The WIZARD

OCT. '40

Adventures in Money Making

A STREET & SMITH PUBLICATION

CASH GORMAN, IN A
ULL LENGTH NOVEL
ILD THE SWORD
WITH GOLD

CENTS

OCT. 1940

"AND TO THINK... I might have lost you!"

"I DON'T KNOW *how I could ever have been such a fool, Betsy... such a careless, unthinking idiot...*"

"Don't say that, darling. It was partly my fault, too. I should have told you . . . said something. But it's such an embarrassing subject to talk about—a person's breath! I didn't know how *to tell you."*

"It'll never happen again, dearest. I've learned my lesson—plenty. Thank heaven Bill saw the way things were going with us. And did he give me the devil about it, too! . . . Told me point-blank what the trouble was, and asked me how I expected any girl to stay in love with a man who constantly offended that way."*

Many Offend Without Realizing It

What else can ruin romance so quickly as halitosis* (bad breath)? And the worst of it is that if you yourself have this insidious condition you may not even know it . . . or even realize that you are offending.

In some cases halitosis is due to systemic conditions which call for treatment by your doctor. But usually . . . and fortunately . . . bad breath is due, say some authorities, to the fermentation of tiny food particles on tooth, gum, and mouth surfaces.

Sweetens the Breath

Listerine Antiseptic quickly halts such fermentation, and then overcomes the odors it causes. The breath becomes sweeter, fresher, more agreeable—less likely to offend.

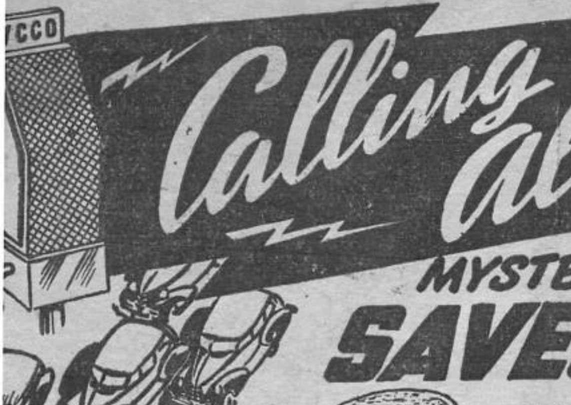
If you are a heavy smoker you'll find Listerine Antiseptic almost invaluable. It does such a grand job of combating tobacco odors and ridding the mouth of that stale, musty taste caused by excessive smoking.

In any case, if you want people to like you . if you want to be at your best . . . make a habit using Listerine Antiseptic before all import engagements. It may pay you real dividends social and business success.

LAMBERT PHARMACAL COMPANY, *St. L*

LISTERINE ANTISEPTIC . . . for a sweeter breath

Calling All Cars!



A MYSTERIOUS DISCOVERY SAVES UP TO 30% on GASOLINE!

OR COSTS NOTHING TO TRY

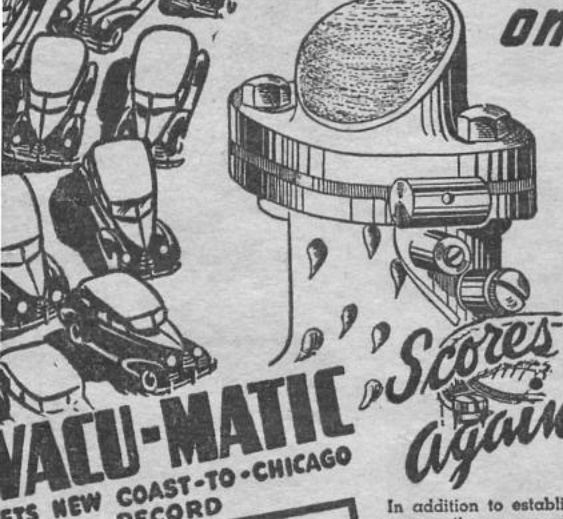
Answer this call! Investigate this remarkable discovery that trims dollars off gasoline bills —gives you worthwhile gas savings—more power — greater speed — quicker pickup — faster acceleration. Proven so efficient, it is guaranteed to save up to 30% and give better performance or the trial costs you nothing.

Automatic Supercharge Principle

Vacu-matic is *entirely different!* It operates on the supercharge principle by automatically adding a charge of extra oxygen, drawn free from the outer air, into the heart of the gas mixture. It is entirely automatic and allows the motor to "breathe" at the correct time, opening and closing *automatically* as required to save dollars on gas costs.

VACU-MATIC

ETS NEW COAST-TO-CHICAGO RECORD



BOB McKENZIE
TRANSCONTINENTAL AUTOMOBILE CHAMPION
COAST TO COAST

Vacu-matic Carburetor Co.
7617 W. State Street
Wauwatosa, Wisconsin

Dear Sirs:

Having just completed a new speed record between Los Angeles and Chicago, driving a Chevrolet equipped with a Vacu-matic carburetor control, I thought you might be interested in knowing some of the facts and the important part Vacu-matic played in the success of the run.

The distance covered was 2322 miles in thirty-nine hours and forty-two minutes, officially timed by Western Union, which gave me an average speed of 58.7 M.P.H. based on elapsed time and with the Vacu-matic averaged 18-1/2 miles per gallon on gasoline.

Before leaving Los Angeles, we made several test runs both with and without the Vacu-matic, and the tests proved that Vacu-matic increased my gas mileage 3-1/2 miles per gallon at the driving speed of 60 M.P.H. and also very noticeable increase in both acceleration and power.

Yours very truly,
Bob McKenzie

Scores again

In addition to establishing new mileage records on cars in all sections of the country, the Vacu-matic has proven itself on thousands of road tests and on dynamometer tests which duplicate road conditions and record accurate mileage and horse power increases.

You, too, can make a road test with Vacu-matic on your car and prove its worthwhile gas savings to your entire satisfaction.

Learn all about this remarkable discovery. Get the facts NOW!

Fits All Cars

Easy To Install

Vacu-matic is constructed of six parts assembled and fused into one unit, adjusted and *sealed at the factory.* Nothing to regulate. Any motorist can install in ten minutes. The free offer coupon will bring all the facts. Mail it today!

he Vacu-matic Co. **Wauwatosa, Wis.**

Sworn Proof of Gas Savings

This certifies that I have carefully read 300 original letters received from Vacu-matic users testifying to gas savings up to 30%, many reporting added power, smoother running, and quicker pick-up. These letters are just a small part of the larger file of enthusiastic user letters that I saw at the company offices.

Signed
Notary Public

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Vacu-matic offers a splendid opportunity for unusual sales and profits. Every car, truck, tractor, and motorcycle owner a prospect. Valuable territories now being assigned. If you help us introduce it to a friend, you can obtain your own free. Check and mail coupon today.

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Name ....

Address ....

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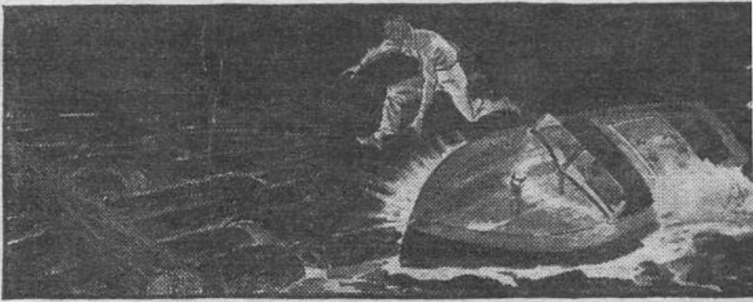
WIZ—1

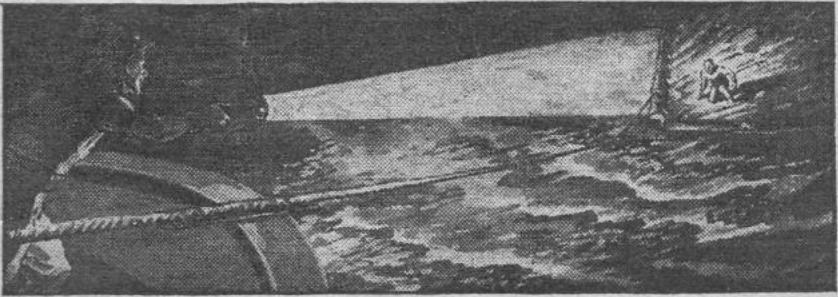
TERROR STRICKEN, I LEAPT TOWARD THE SINISTER SHAPE!

A true experience of J. H. WILLIAMS, *Victoria, B. C.*

"ONE BLACK NIG
I was returning to V
couver, in my 15-f
inboard motorboa
writes Mr. Willia
"Suddenly, a dark a
sinister shape loom
up directly ahe
There was no time
avoid it.

"I LEAPT as the boat crashed into the object —and found myself sitting on a crossbeam of a huge log boom that was being towed by a distant tug. My boat was gone. Shivering with cold, I shouted in vain—the tug was too far away for my voice to reach it.





"AFTER HOURS OF TORTURE, the night became stormy and the tug skipper shortened his line. Again I shouted—and this time a flashlight on the tug picked me out with its powerful beam. To the 'Eveready' *fresh* DATED batteries in *that* flashlight I probably owe my life—and you can take it from me, *I* am an 'Eveready' convert now. *(Signed)* J. H. Williams"

OCT. 1940
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EXTRA
LONG LI
BATTER
NATIONAL CARBON CO
PRODUCT

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NATIONAL CARBON COMPANY, INC., 30 EAST 42nd STREET, NEW YORK, N. Y.
Unit of Union Carbide UCC and Carbon Corporation

The WIZARD

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FULL-LENGTH NOVEL

GILD THE SWORD WITH GOLD . . Phil R. Sheridan . . . 9

Cash Gorman, the wizard of odds, wakes up to find himself thrust in the middle of a scheme of international intrigue and swindle with himself slated as the number one victim. Events are stacked against him; even the law is with the opposition, and Cash faces defeat and loss of life and money because one link in the chain of circumstances will not fall into place. His search for the lost factor is exciting adventure in money making.

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ESCAPE MECHANISM . . . . . Arthur Mann 79

Meanie Mooney was a likely subject for experiment until his coat embarrassed him.

RACES AND ROMANCE . . . . . Carl Henry 87

George Delong leads his horse to water but finds he himself is the thirsty one.

GOATS IS GOATS . . . . Jess Carver 96

Inheritance is a smelly thing when goats go along with it, as Culpepper Twig discovers.

OIL AND THE TRIANGLE . . . . Dean Parker 106

Things begin humming on the Wallace campus when the professor makes an investment.

COVER BY HUBERT ROGERS

All stories in this magazine are fiction. No actual persons are designated either by name or character. Any similarity is coincidental.

NEXT ISSUE
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HAVE YOU MET HIM?

PROBABLY NOT! But we have been acquainted with Cash Gorman for so long that we feel everybody must know him. He is a modern musketeer with money, and we are certain you'll find him doing things which you'd like to do —yes, even long to do.

First there is one thing we want to get straight. Cash is no up-to-date Galahad going to the defense of the lady for the honor of the bally thing. Nor is he a stream-lined Robin Hood taking it from the plunderer to spread good things among the oppressed. Cash is in there pitching for and against the odds for the sake of the odds themselves. But there is more than that. He does not rise to the bait of money for the sake of turning a pretty profit on anything which happens along.

"Gild the Sword with Gold," which introduces Thomas Jefferson Gorman to you, is a typical example of what makes Cash tick. In the first place, Cash is not a fellow who goes in both dollars and cents for conservative, well-heeled investments. He likes excitement for his dollars, especially if the opposition appears anxious to push him around as well as to fleece him.

He is no knight in armor. He is a solid citizen able and ready to take care of himself in all sorts of situations—as you might be called up to do it. Not to every citizen goes the ability to toy with firearms in the manner of a superior marksman who can bend the flight of a bullet around a corner or crash a fist through a stone wall. Cash is like you and me; he is made of ordinary flesh and blood, and possessed of a trigger-quick wit, which is his only weapon—that and an unscrupulous conscience where the forces of unlawfulness and disorder are concerned.

We have confidence that as The Wizard grows up you'll get to anticipate Cash Gorman's coming as a visit from an exciting friend just back from an adventure, much as you yourself might be, or would like to be.

Cash may not be a blustering person doing all manner of feats on a heroic scale, but at least he's interesting. That much we promise you.

• • •

BACK of Cash are several persons whom we are fairly certain you may meet again. One of these is Culpepper Twig. Culpepper is the embodiment of the fellow you know who hangs around the corner. He does no one any harm, but is the brunt of every lame joke that happens along. Nobody knows much about Culpepper except that he's there, bothering nobody. At least, he wasn't until a relative died and left him a heritage of goats. In "Goats is Goats," Jess Carver gives you an idea of what Culpepper can accomplish if he sets his mind to things other than wasting his waking hours. Especially when somebody dislikes him and his goats.

• • •

Cash Gorman is ready for you in another exciting adventure in money making in "Million Dollar Mutuel." Watch for his next appearance, for the odds are ten thousand to one he can't get through. It's about a racetrack without a track and without horses, and Cash's struggles against sportsmen, politicians and gangsters to supply both the deficiencies. Try it in the next issue of The Wizard!

KNOW RADIO *as* *Trained Technicians Know It*

Many Make $30, $40, $50 a Week

Don't envy trained Radio Technicians because of their good pay, pleasant work; because everybody admires their technical knowledge and skill. Mail the Coupon. Learn how hundreds of men trained at home nights and became Radio Technicians without giving up their jobs or going to expensive schools. Get the facts about the "Radio Night School That Comes To You!"

HUNDREDS LEARNED RADIO AT HOME NIGHTS, GOT GOOD JOBS

Yes, hundreds of men from all walks of life are in pleasant, well-paying Radio jobs today because they trained at home nights to be Radio Technicians. These men hold jobs in practically every branch of Radio—installing, fixing, selling home and auto Radio sets; operating and maintaining Broadcast, Police, Aviation, Commercial, Experimental Radio Stations; selling, installing and servicing loudspeaker systems. Newer fields such as Television, Commercial Electronic Devices also offer opportunities now and for the future to Radio Technicians.

WHY MANY GET GOOD JOBS WITH GOOD PAY IN RADIO

Anyone can tune a Radio receiver, but very few can fix one when it doesn't work right; few can operate or maintain a Broadcast Station or handle the many other types of jobs which require a Technician's knowledge of Radio. That's why so many trained Radio Technicians get good pay, steady work, plenty of opportunities for advancement—why others hold jobs in other lines and operate a profitable spare time Radio business right from their own homes.

MANY MAKE FROM $5 TO $10 A WEEK IN SPARE TIME WHILE LEARNING

The N. R. I. "Night-School-at-Home" Course gives you a thorough training in Radio and Television principles; actual experience working with real Radio parts building circuits, test instruments and other Radio apparatus. In addition, a special section of the Course shows you how to do many Radio jobs which you can cash in on as you learn them. That's why many Radio Technicians earn good money—from $5 to $10 a week fixing Radio sets in spare time while learning. I ALSO GIVE YOU A MODERN, PROFESSIONAL ALL-WAVE, ALL-PURPOSE SET SERVICING INSTRUMENT to help you make money fixing Radios while learning and equip you for full time work after you graduate.

Chief Operator Broadcasting Station

When I completed 20 lessons, I obtained my Radio Broadcast Operator's license and immediately joined Station WMPC where I am now Chief Operator.
HOLLIS F. HAYES
327 Madison Street
Lapeer, Michigan

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For the last two years I have been in business for myself making between $200 to $300 a month. Business has steadily increased. I have N. R. I. to thank for my start in this field.
ARLIE J. FROEHNER
300 W. Texas Ave.
Goose Creek, Texas

FIND OUT WHAT RADIO OFFERS YOU MAIL COUPON FOR FACTS NOW!

The thorough, easy-to-understand N. R. I. "Night School" Course in Practical Radio and Television has actually doubled, yes tripled, the earnings of some. It has put hundreds of men into good-pay technical Radio jobs—into pleasant work with good pay—the type of work other persons admire. Get "Rich Rewards in Radio" FREE today. See for yourself how easy it is to prepare at home nights for Radio's spare time and full time opportunities and those coming in Television. Read more than 100 letters from men who started in Radio this way. Get the facts about this great, growing field with a future. Mail the coupon now—in an envelope, or paste it on a penny postcard.

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National Radio Institute, Dept. OGD
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DISTURBING YET FASCINATING

Those three words seem to sum up the editorial policy of UNKNOWN—a story must, of course, be fascinating to many readers, but an UNKNOWN story must also be disturbing.

Now comes the disturbing (yet fascinating) part of the magazine itself. People by the hundreds write in to tell us that UNKNOWN is not just another specialized-fiction magazine. That it's unique. It expresses a new note in modern literature.

So we're experimenting. We've made the new cover look very dignified. We're going to ask your newsdealer to display it with magazines of general class—not with the newsprints.

And we're asking you—do you like the more dignified cover? Isn't it more fitting for a magazine containing such stories?

We'd like to hear from you.

The Editor

UNKNOWN

Gild THE SWORD WITH GOLD

BY PHIL R. SHERIDAN

● An adventure of Cash Gorman, a musketeer with weapons more formidable than guns; a quick wit and the courage to use it daringly.

CHAPTER I.

SNATCHED!

THE glow of the lights shining on the golden dome of the Colorado State capitol reflected a brilliance against a clear night sky that was breath-taking. Having emerged from the Golden Fleece Hotel to Fifteenth Street, Thomas Jefferson Gorman breathed deeply and drank in the eye-filling sight.

It was one to behold, and as his father, "the Cap'n," might have said: "Things happen in such settin'."

Jeff stopped at the curb and meditated. It was striking and, he decided, well worth the trip from San Francisco, even if the adventure Martin Rossi sent him after had developed into a conservative investment instead of an exciting speculation. Investments, Jeff pondered, were for the likes of prosaic bankers like Martin. But not for him. He'd prefer wildcatting to government bonds, if the truth must be known.

Suddenly and decisively he felt an impact against his spine. There was no mistaking the object which was pressed there. It could only be a gun! Jeff had a deep respect for guns. He had seen men vibrant and living one moment and still and very dead the next. Yet the only thought which occurred to him was ludicrous: This was a hell of a way to interrupt a man in the deep contemplation of the devious ways of destiny, and right out in public, on a well-traversed thoroughfare!

Jeff settled into cold thought. His eyes wandered up and down the street for signs of a policeman. His body didn't move. A holdup man desperate enough to dare such a coup as this would think nothing of pulling a trigger to escape. Jeff decided blood-letting, especially his own, would be too heroic at the moment.

"That's right," a cool, well-pitched feminine voice said. "Don't move!"

Jeff suppressed a start of surprise. It was difficult, but he managed it. A woman's voice, cultivated and with a slight suggestion of an accent was incongruous with a pistol shoved in your back. Well, things happen.

"Tch, tch—a lady," he said, conversationally. "Madame, I fear you've neglected Emily Post. Carrying weapons is very much de trop."

"Very witty, Mr. Ray," the woman's voice said. "But just don't move. Your automobile is approaching."

Out of the corner of his eye, Jeff saw a black sedan pulling slowly up the street. Simultaneously, the significance of what she had just said struck him. He had been mistaken for a man named Ray. The name sounded vaguely familiar, but he couldn't place it.

"Your mistaken, darling—I'm not Mr. Ray," he said. "My name is Thomas Jefferson Gorman, and if you would like to call the whole thing off I will just walk across the street without looking back."

"So you're not Mr. Ray?" she said, pressing the gun harder against the small of his back. "That probably explains the fact that you just now answered the page for Mr. Ray in the hotel lobby."

That was where he'd heard the name. A page had been calling the name when he stepped up to Jeff to ask him if he wanted a letter he'd just dictated to the public stenographer sent air mail. Clearly a case of mistaken identity! But people who make mistakes with guns in their hands were not, in Jeff's book, nice people to argue with. In times of stress some persons count ten and others just get confused. Jeff always burst into song. Softly, in a rich baritone voice, he gave off: "Drink to me only with thine eyes—"

"Stop that," snapped the woman.

The automobile pulled up to them and Jeff turned suddenly, getting, in return, his third shock of the evening. The woman was one he had just observed in the lobby, a tawny blonde. He'd thought she might be interesting. Now she carried a gun in a small hand muff, pressed hard against him and raised it so the muzzle pointed directly in his face. Her eyes shone as she said:

"No tricks!" Her voice was hard. And there was no relief to her features in the varied lights of the street. She had the look of a woman who was given to dangerous living.

"I could embarrass you by making a loud outcry," he suggested tentatively. "There are people around—"

"Yes," she said, "lots of them, especially behind you."

"Beautiful little girls shouldn't play with guns," he said. He could see that his manner disconcerted her. He grabbed her gun arm, imprisoning it expertly, and pointed the muzzle harmlessly toward the curb. But it was too late.

"Get in der car, Mr. Ray," a heavy male voice behind him commanded. A uniformed chauffeur stood beside the opened door of the auto, his hand menacingly poked into his right-hand coat pocket.

"I'm warning you," Jeff said, "you've got the wrong man."

"You'll do," the woman said. "We want the pleasure of your company, anyway," she added, somewhat sarcastically. She laughed a little, doubtless from relief at the timely arrival of her confederate.

"Get in the car!" she demanded.

Jeff entered the car behind the woman and found she had already occupied one corner of the seat. In the other sat a squat, heavy-set man, his face in the shadows. On his lap was a light coat and beneath it Jeff made out the barrel of an automatic. The man motioned Gorman toward the space between himself and the woman and said: "Sit down, Mr. Ray. It's nice to see you."

"Mr. Ray seems to be in difficulties," Jeff remarked. "Tell me, doesn't he have a first name? All this formality makes me nervous."

"Considering what you've been up to, George dear, I'd feel nervous, too," the woman said.

The man on Jeff's left spoke sharply, his voice guttural: "Undoubtedly Herr Steele will be interested in your conversational abilities, Mr. Ray," he said. "Me, I am not interested. Shut up."

Jeff inclined his head toward the woman. But he was not looking at her. He was peering through the window trying to follow the car's course. She made no attempt to stop him. Instead, she inspected his face with speculative eyes.

"Pull down the blinds, Nada," the man commanded.

"Nice name—Nada," Jeff remarked. "Abbreviated Russian, no doubt. Are you Russian? Yes, possibly White Russian. Know lots of White Russians; witty people. Live by 'em. Have you ever been in Shanghai?"

"Shut up," snapped the man beside him. But Jeff had had as much of an answer as he'd expected in the quick, startled movement of the woman at his side. Oblivious of the man's command he went on:

"Nice town, Shanghai. I just came from there," he added. "A smart person can pick up a lot of money there."

The man's hand struck him hard across the mouth. Instantly, Jeff's left hand shot under the man's arm and clamped down on the back of his neck in a half nelson. In one continuous motion Jeff pulled him over his upraised knee, which sank into the middle of the man's stomach. Jeff then shoved his winded assailant to the floor and pressed the man against the front seat with his feet. He grabbed the gun off the floor.

"I especially don't like to be hit in the porcelain," Jeff said, handing Nada the automatic. "Don't worry, darling, I'm not heroic enough to escape from this arsenal. But I don't like guys like him particularly."

The woman whistled softly.

"We were talking about Shanghai," Jeff said. "City of opportunity, Shanghai. Money to be made there by smart people."

Nada did not answer, but her shoulder pressed against his. Jeff knew she could be interested in matters pertaining to money and said no more. The car purred on, the driver unmindful of anything untoward in the rear seat.

Jeff summed up, methodically checking up the points on his fingers: First, there was the mysterious George Ray, who was apparently a visitor at the Golden Fleece Hotel or who, at least, had an engagement to meet someone there. Second, Nada, whose duty it was to put the finger on him. Third, neither Nada nor the two men knew George Ray by sight. Fourth, it was probably with Nada that George Ray had the engagement at a specified time and at which time she had had him paged to learn his identity. The message had probably been for Ray to await her on the corner. That was where the mistake in identity had occurred. Fifth, there was Herr Steele. Jeff was most thankful for Herr Steele. The news of their forthcoming interview had been very welcome, indeed. It at least assured him that he was not to be shot and dumped in a ditch with no further questions asked.

Jeff came to the conclusion that he really had nothing to worry about. Herr Steele would recognize the mistake at once and that would be the end of an interesting evening. He relaxed; then suddenly his nerves tensed in alarm. The obvious conclusion to everything which had occurred was that these men were foreign agents. As such, could they allow a man named Thomas Jefferson Gorman to return quietly to his hotel, possibly to report to the police what had happened? He put himself in the place of Herr Steele: Mr. Gorman is dangerous. This could lead to but one conclusion: liquidate Mr. Gorman!

There were times when Jeff wished he were not quite so logical. This was one of them.

FINALLY the car came to a halt. Jeff permitted the man on the floor to gain his feet. And then a surprising thing happened. It put Jeff on his guard. His would-be captor made no effort to tell the driver that he'd been manhandled. Alertly he hopped out of the car and walked briskly to the porch of the house before which the car had stopped.

"He must be mad at me," Jeff said.

"Shut up, you fool," said Nada.

It was an unprepossessing house and Jeff was hurried across the lawn to the porch. The street was dark. It obviously was a residential district. Jeff noted, too, that the knocker which decorated the door was shaped in a lion's head.

Entering, he found himself in a dimly lighted passageway. A harsh voice behind him snapped a question in German. Jeff's guard replied: "Nein."

"Turn around," the harsh voice said. Jeff turned and was confronted by a big, surly-looking man with a flat, unexpressive face. He ran swift hands over Jeff.

"I never carry a gun," Jeff remarked. "I find that people who carry guns are too frequently given to using them instead of thinking. That often leads to painful difficulties, such as getting a bellyful of lead. Or, and more annoying, becoming involved with the forces of law and order."

The last was a calculated reference to police, but it had no effect whatever on his captors. The big man silently nodded his head toward an adjacent doorway. Nada opened it and Jeff stepped through to a large room.

There was but one light, a lamp which stood on a desk in the far corner. Behind it, Jeff could make out the vague shape of a man. The flat-faced doorman preceded him to the desk, clicked his heels and reported: "The man Ray, Herr Steele."

"Come forward, Mr. Ray," Herr Steele said. His voice was brusque and metallic.

Jeff stepped within the full light of the desk lamp with caution, thinking to himself, "Here it comes."

No word was spoken for a moment and then, his eyes accustoming themselves to the light which shone in his face, he made out the features of the man behind it.

Herr Steele was almost completely bald. His head was extremely large. His face was heavy, his color an unhealthy saffron. His eyes were brown and overlarge, dominating his face. The eyeballs held a yellowish tint. "The master mind has a bad liver," Jeff thought to himself, "and probably a bad disposition to go with it."

Herr Steele inspected Jeff with an unwinking stare, giving the uneasy impression that his eyes were without lids. His lips were thin and colorless and his neck was bull-like. Suddenly he leaned forward menacingly.

"We've been expecting you, Mr. Ray," he said. There was suppressed fury in his voice. "Why didn't you meet us in San Francisco, according to plan?"

Startled, Jeff hardened his face into a truculent, shielding mask. Ray, obviously, was not known by sight to Steele, either. Jeff thought swiftly. He knew too much about this group. Whatever trouble Ray was in, it could be no more dangerous than his own position. He spoke quickly to forestall any report on the part of his recent companions concerning his denial that he was Ray.

"I thought I was being followed," he replied.

Of all the replies he could have made, this apparently was the least expected.

"What?" Herr Steele demanded. The leader of the group looked up quickly to Nada and the squat man who had been in the car. Jeff's eyes followed Steele's and on the woman's face he saw an expression of complete bewilderment. Then, as he watched, it was replaced by an almost imperceptible enigmatic smile. The squat man said something in German to Herr Steele, who returned his gaze to Jeff.

"By whom were you followed?" he demanded.

Jeff stalled for time. He had to be careful not to say anything and yet to say enough to produce leads for him to follow. "My memory is very poor when I have to stand with lights shining in my face," he remarked. "Don't you have any chairs here?"

Herr Steele made an irritable motion with his hand and the door guard produced a chair. Jeff seated himself leisurely.

"By whom were you followed?" Herr Steele repeated.

"By two men," Jeff said. He described, in the most minute detail, two good friends of his.

Steele stared at him silently for a moment. "Where did you first notice them?"

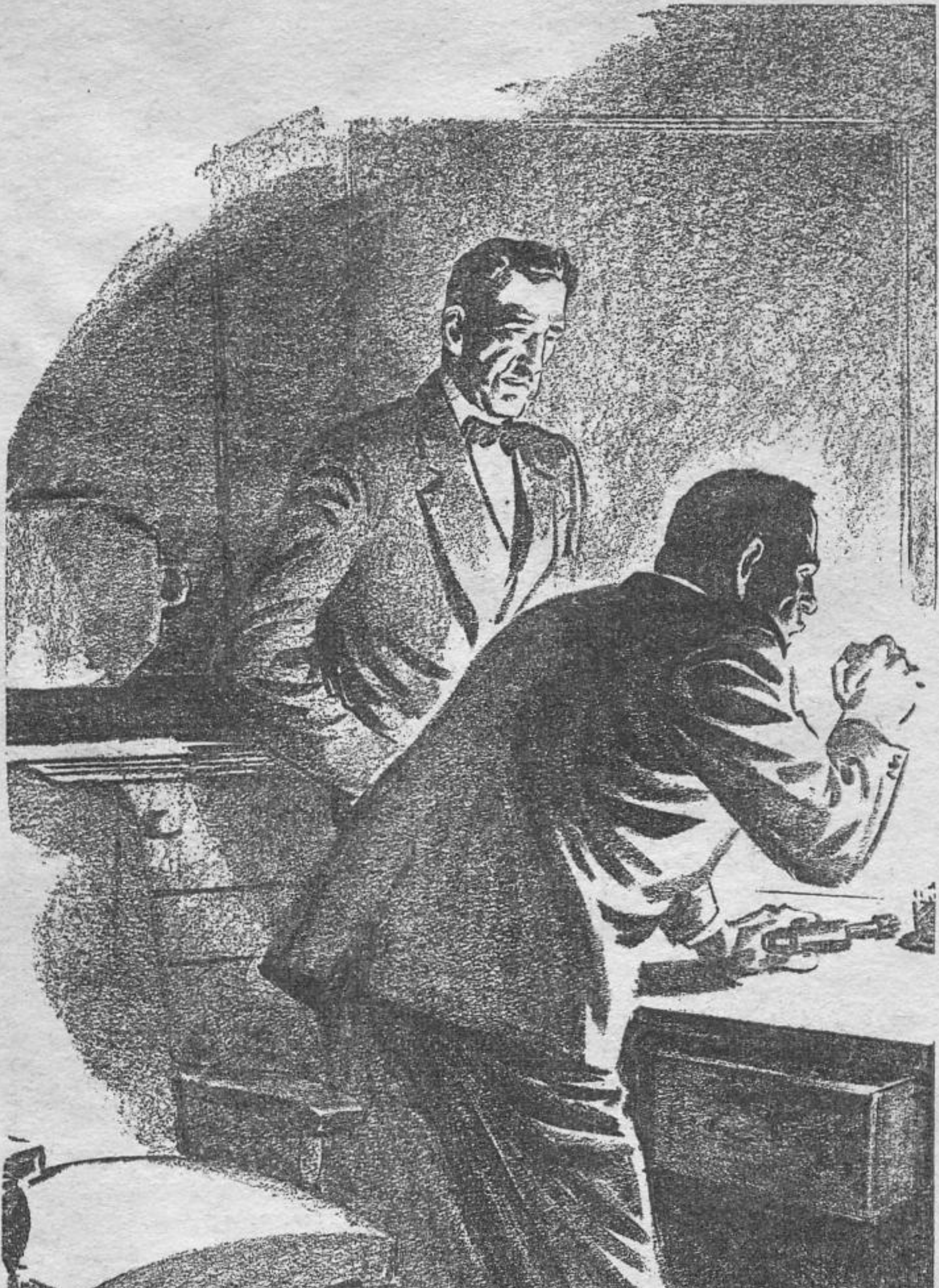
This was getting difficult.

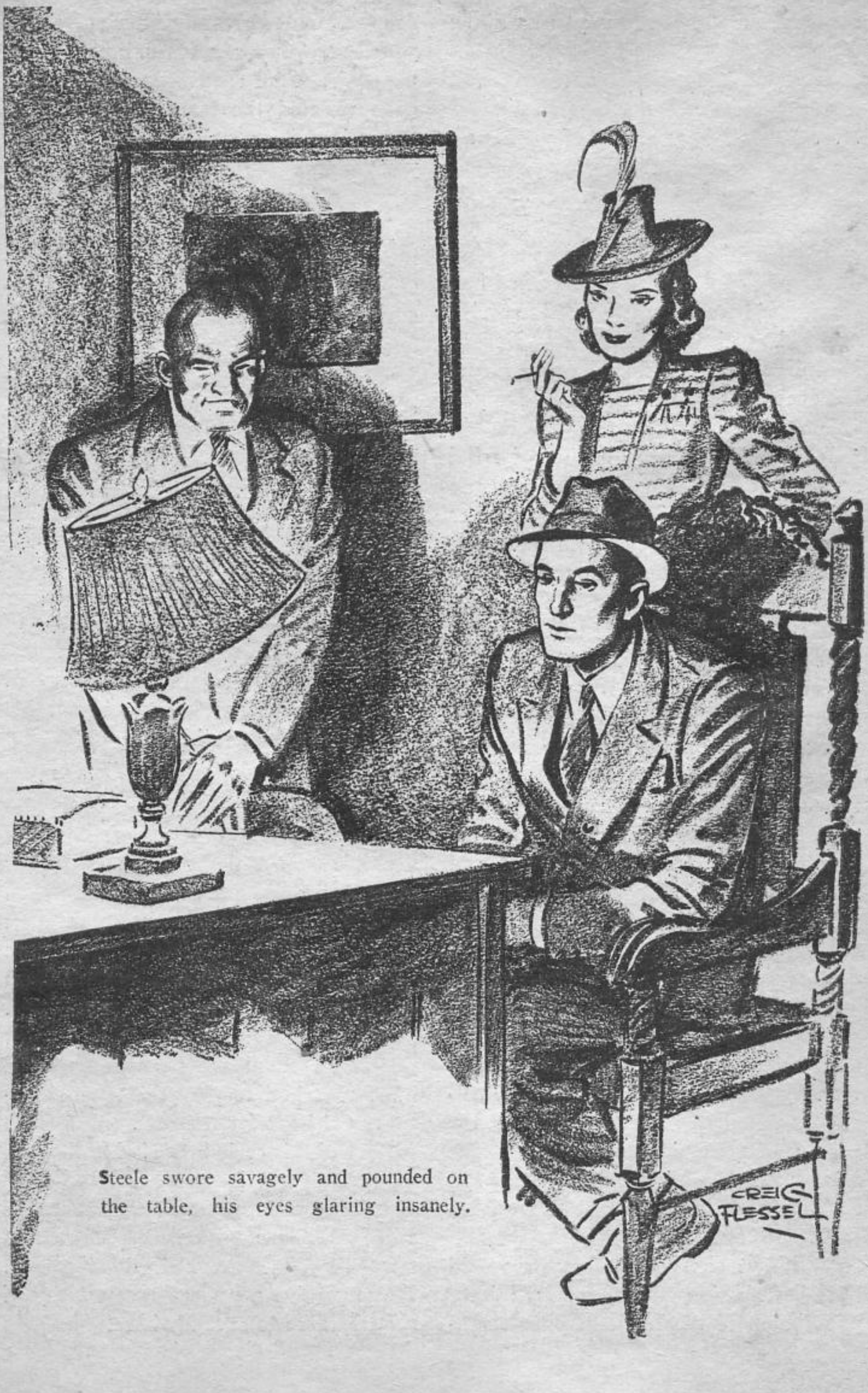
"At the beginning of the trip," he said.

"At the station in Albuquerque?" Steele asked.

Jeff nodded. "At the station," he affirmed. At least, he was now aware of Mr. Ray's point of embarkation.

Herr Steele drummed the table with




CREIG FLESSEL

Steele swore savagely and pounded on the table, his eyes glaring insanely.

his fingers. "What did you do?" he asked.

"I shook them at Los Angeles and took a plane to Denver," Jeff said. "I . . . I would have contacted you, but I was afraid to attempt it. I thought maybe they were government men."

Herr Steele laughed dryly. "You are lying," he said flatly. "You came here directly—to raise money. Mitchell had you traced here when you failed to arrive at San Francisco. We came to Denver immediately. You shall be under surveillance from this moment on. Do you understand?"

Jeff nodded, a deep feeling of relief sweeping over him. Mr. Ray was not going to be shot and, as Mr. Ray, neither was he if he could keep up this pretense.

"You have been trying to raise money from your friends; even the banks!" Steele glared at him. "Is that not so?"

"I have no comment to make," Jeff declared.

Steele laughed, but without humor. "*You* have no comment to make, you yellow swine. Well, I have several comments. It is useless for you to try to raise funds for the purpose of fleeing the country," he said. From the drawer of his desk he took a Luger automatic and placed it on the desk before him, where the lamplight glinted forebodingly on the dark barrel. "Do I make myself clear?"

"Disgustingly so," Jeff said.

"Your levity is most displeasing to me," Herr Steele said. "I find your entire attitude intolerable. Possibly Mitchell has failed to impress upon you the gravity of your situation. I will make it clear. You are indispensable to us as a figurehead for Ladrones Petroleum, Inc.

"Without our assistance, you would have been bankrupt, indicted for misappropriation of the funds of your stockholders. As the result of our assistance you are now in a position to become rich. Or dead! And remember, you already have violated the laws of the United States by failing to register the fact that you are producing helium; therefore, you cannot afford to appeal to the courts."

Jeff felt himself tense up inside. Helium! With all his will power he attempted to maintain a poker face. To show any astonishment now would be fatal.

"O. K.," he said sullenly, with the air of a man caught in a trap. "What do you want me to do?"

Steele looked at him with his staring, hypnotic eyes. "You are afraid," he said. "Untrustworthy." He fingered the Luger. "We may have to take your sister as a hostage." His expression was infinitely menacingly.

"You wouldn't do that!" Jeff exclaimed, summoning up what he hoped was the expression of horror which this threat was meant to inspire.

"We would do anything," was the grim answer. "That helium is essential —essential to our cause!"

Steele's tone, the way he said "our cause!" made Jeff taut his muscles. His nerves were tense. Steele meant that nothing would stand in the way of the "cause," and he knew at once he was drawing cards in a very dangerous game. As the cards were falling at the moment they were all marked—marked against him! He had to play them out, however, and hope for the best. He had to get out of this eerie house! He thought of Poland and Norway and the Low Countries and estimated the unimportance of Thomas Jefferson Gorman to the "cause." He needed his wits now. He must give a performance worthy of a Barrymore to save his hide!

He was of half a mind to tell them they'd captured the wrong man. He half suspected they would have let him go, but, accustomed to dangerous spots, Jeff was too acute to the possible spot Steele and his cohorts might be in to risk such a long-shot gamble. He summoned his courage and whined: "You'll never get the stuff through."

Steele's eyes seemed to swell malignantly. His thin lips curved in a contemptuous smile. "Don't try to welsh now," he said. "We don't become frightened and *you*—you're into this up to your neck. Don't worry about getting it through. It will go to Vladivostock in Russian ships; in submarines, if necessary. The Russians have plenty of them."

"Yes, but I'm . . . I'm in the middle here," Jeff stammered. "What if the government finds out what we are doing?"

"You coward!" Steele spat out the words. "You were willing enough to take our money when you feared you were going to jail. Now produce! How can you be caught? The Ladrones are isolated. Nobody goes there. All your laborers are reliable. Mitchell has perfected the delivery system. Mitchell's accountant is an expert at falsifying the books, as you know. They will be perfectly in order for tax purposes—showing petroleum sales direct to our own Central American Steamship Co. You will be a millionaire."

Jeff nodded mutely.

"Where is the stock you were to transfer to us in San Francisco?" Steele demanded ominously.

"In my bank in San Francisco," Jeff said.

"You will send for it at once. By the telegraph. Tonight," Steele said. "If it is not here by Saturday morning, then we take your sister."

Jeff shook his head in assent.

"Why hasn't production begun on a large scale?" Steele demanded. "Where are your reports?"

"I don't have them with me," Jeff said.

Steele made an impatient gesture. "Very well, tell me briefly. I will see the reports tomorrow."

"I . . . I need more money," Jeff said. It was the only explanation he could think of.

Steele swore savagely and pounded on the table, his eyes glaring insanely. "Always you need more money." He picked up the Luger and pointed the muzzle at Jeff.

"If you are trying to sabotage our work, you won't live." His voice rose to a scream. Then he sank into silence. Finally, he spoke again: "Exchange is hard to get. We won't give you any more money. You have had enough. Every penny you asked for. You embezzled funds once; maybe you have been doing it again. Not a penny until you begin delivery in quantity. You will have two weeks."

"Where can I get the money?" Jeff asked.

"You have friends—tell them you have brought in oil. Tell them anything. But stay away from that field. Sell your own stock. Nobody will ask questions once we begin paying dividends." He paused, and then went on as if he were talking to a noncommissioned officer: "I will see you tomorrow morning at ten o'clock. Nada will accompany you. As a matter of fact, you will see a great deal of Nada. For the period of your stay here, she is your fiancée. Others will be watching, also. Don't try anything. Good night."

CHAPTER II.

BAITING THE WEB.

JEFF was escorted swiftly to the darkened limousine, the light from the street lamp playing briefly on his face as he was hurried into the car. It revealed a man whose age could have been anywhere in the late twenties or early thirties. He was approximately six feet tall, lean and broad-shouldered. His hair was coarse and black, his face beaten to a dark tan by wind and sun. It was neither a handsome face nor an ugly one, but it commanded attention because of his eyes. They were intense, black and alive and constantly alert, belying the almost lazy leisure of his movements. There was a slight suspicion of knotted bone at the bridge of his nose, as if it might have been broken at one time, and his cheekbones were high; features which possibly would have given his countenance a sharp, ruthless cast were it not for a wide, humorous mouth.

He sank back in the seat of the car and was relieved to find that only Nada got in beside him. She must know the answers to a great many of the questions which were revolving in his mind as he considered the situation. He could see possibilities of a stray helium field. The British, for instance, would be greatly interested. Discovery of important new deposits would furnish them with a strong talking point with which to approach the state department at Washington with regard to lifting the embargo on helium. He ran out of figures trying to calculate how much of it they could use.

Jeff chuckled to himself with amusement as the car moved off, driven by the same stony-faced chauffeur who had assisted the woman beside him in forcing him into the car.

"What's so funny?" Nada inquired.

"I was just thinking of a friend of mine and what he would think of all this," Jeff replied. Martin Rossi would have been horrified, were he aware of the situation into which he had innocently plunged Jeff as the result of his ardent efforts to induce Jeff to invest his money in rock-ribbed, conservative real-estate development. As always when he thought of his San Francisco banker friend, he jingled the handful of change and heavy silver dollars in his pocket. It was a pleasant feeling and so, too, was the weight of folded bank notes in the other pocket of his trousers.

Rossi was always horror-stricken at the amount of cash Jeff carried in his pockets, but he liked to carry money. In his wallet was another thousand dollars in cash; a vest pocket held five hundred dollars and there was five hundred dollars more folded in his pocket handkerchief.

"Why don't you carry a check book?" Rossi would always ask him. "Any man who walks around with more than one hundred dollars in his pocket is a fool. Even that's too much."

"A check book is O. K.," Jeff would assure him. "I have one, you know. However, there's nothing like cash. There are times when you might miss out on something good if you didn't have it."

"Yes, and there are times when you just miss out," Rossi would caution him. Jeff never disagreed with him on this point, as there were, indeed, times when his total bankroll was measured in silver, and small pieces of silver at that. He had, as a matter of fact, debarked from the plane at Shanghai just three months previously with seventy-six dollars in his pocket. Things always seemed to happen, though.

"I don't understand your philosophy," Rossi would complain. "Three thousand dollars in pocket money. Ridiculous! If I didn't know you better, I'd think you liked to show off."

"Maybe I do," Jeff had told him one day, causing the banker to shake his head despairingly when Jeff added: "It gets around when you carry money and you know the old proverb: 'Molasses catches flies.' But it also attracts leeches. Of course, flies and leeches aren't interesting, but once in a while you attract a nice, big, fat spider. And I like spiders. They're always well heeled."

OF course, there in the present instance it was a case of mistaken identity, but there was no doubt that Herr Steele was a spider of magnificent proportions. His thoughts sobered. His situation now was more rather than less dangerous than it had been before he entered the mysterious headquarters of the German agent. He knew what they were up to and it probably would be but a matter of hours before they would realize the gross blunder which they had committed. Steele could deal in death as well as helium, and Jeff was not one to consider danger with any false air of bravado.

Only a few days had passed since he had left China too few hours ahead of the Japanese secret police for comfort. He preferred more peaceful promotions and would never have undertaken the Chinese venture had he not been flat broke. However, he took considerable pride in that affair, for it had required ingenuity to promote four hundred thousand dollars' worth of Japanese machine-gun bullets for the small sum of fifty thousand borrowed dollars and their consequent resale to the Chinese at a bargain price of one hundred and seventy-five thousand dollars. Generally speaking, he didn't approve of dealing in munitions, but considered that one almost a patriotic effort. It was, at least, in the cause of democracy. The Chinese had been grateful. He had been pleased and so, too, had the Japanese involved, excepting, of course, two gentlemen who had quite literally lost their heads. With a start, he realized that his affairs were getting considerably involved with the totalitarian powers; first Japan and now Germany.

Nada moved impatiently beside him and the feeling came to Jeff that his silence disturbed her. He wondered if Mr. Ray was a gentleman with a reputation for being chatty.

"Cigarette?" Jeff asked.

"Yes, thank you," she replied. As he held the match for her, he studied her face with interest. She was a Russian, he decided; probably the daughter of a White Russian refugee who had settled in China after the revolution, for his earlier reference to Shanghai had certainly struck home. Her hair was tawny, her face decidedly oval and high-cheekboned. Her eyes were wide, pale-blue and she had a large mouth, slightly sensuous. She was tall, wide-shouldered; a striking woman. And interesting, she was thirty, possibly a shade younger. With amusement he saw her return his match-light scrutiny with equal interest.

They laughed, simultaneously, Jeff's ringing out with startling clarity, hers deep and throaty.

"Our engagement was rather sudden, wasn't it, darling?" she asked.

"That's your understatement for the week," Jeff replied. "I feel like the guest of honor at a shotgun wedding."

"I'm sure we'll find our betrothal most enjoyable," she laughed.

"Perhaps so," Jeff said. He reached

out a hand to raise one of the window curtains.

"No, no," she protested. "The chauffeur wouldn't approve."

"O. K.," Jeff said agreeably. "I wouldn't want to displease the chauffeur. At least, our squat, square-headed friend isn't with us. What's his name, anyway?"

"Hans. He'll be at the hotel waiting for us," Nada assured him. "Herr Steele is so solicitous about my engagements. He always provides a chaperon."

"Always?" Jeff asked. "Well, well; often a fiancée and never a bride." He slipped his arm around her and drew her close to him, whispering in her ear so that he couldn't be overheard by the driver: "What's the score in this game, baby?"

"Do you mean personally?" she asked. Jeff had not meant precisely that, but he followed this line of thought for some time. It was always well to be on good terms with at least one division of the enemy.

"You can pull up the shades," the chauffeur said finally.

"We're quite cozy this way," Jeff replied.

"Hush," Nada whispered, raising the shades and revealing that the car was on Champa Street. Jeff drew his pocket handkerchief out and after removing the lipstick, slipped the five one-hundred-dollar bills which had been rolled within it into Nada's hand. "I'm sorry I don't have an engagement ring," he said. "Suppose you buy yourself one."

Watching the back of the chauffeur's head out of the corner of her eye, she flipped through the bills and gasped.

"What's your game?" she asked finally.

"That's what I want to know," he said. "Of course, I can play the hand that's been dealt me, but it's so much more fun to look at the hole cards. How about a peak?"

She shook her head vigorously and nodded toward the chauffeur. She seemed frightened and undecided. Jeff grinned and relaxed as the car proceeded up Sixteenth Street. "As the Cap'n always said: 'Things do happen.'"

CROSSING the sidewalk to the hotel entrance, Nada slipped her arm through Jeff's. "I'm afraid they don't realize how dangerous a man you are," she said tensely. "And I don't think you realize how dangerous they can be."

Cryptically, she added: "Deal yourself out. Leave town."

"After just becoming engaged?" he asked in horror. "Why, I couldn't even think of it. Besides, you know what Herr Steele told me." Jeff looked quickly around the lobby, spotting Hans. "Ah, there's our boy friend."

The squat, square-headed man whom Nada Gerling had called Hans arose from a chair near the door and got about his shadowing business.

"What's the program now?" Jeff asked.

"You have my permission to go to bed," she replied graciously. "As your fiancée, darling, I wouldn't want you loitering around the lobby and flirting with strange women. As a matter of fact, I would advise you not to speak with anyone excepting myself."

"Well, then I advise you to wait right here because I am a confirmed lobby sitter and I never, never go to bed at such an early hour," Jeff said. "I am going upstairs, but I'll be right down again."

She shrugged her shoulders and seated herself. "Very well: I'll be here." She gestured toward Hans with her head.

"Don't try to duck out; the night air wouldn't be healthy!"

Jeff grinned and made his way across the lobby to the cashier's window. There was a hint of a roll to his walk, suggestive of a man who had been at sea for a long time. Even among his friends, few knew it, but he had, indeed, literally been brought up at sea. He had been too young to remember when his mother died, but his father had been the captain of a tramp freighter and the first sixteen years of Jeff's life had been spent aboard ships, generally old and well-rusted ones which poked their industrious noses in and out of smelly ports everywhere in the Orient, South America and Europe.

Jeff had been seventeen when the Cap'n had put him in a boarding school in Baltimore, paid his tuition for a year, furnished him with papers attesting to his American citizenship and departed from Jeff's life, excepting for one communication.

In June, when the school was let out, Jeff had received a letter from Singapore inclosing an American Express Co. check and a letter which said:

> DEAR SON:
>
> Here is your grubstake. Play the cards that are dealt you and never deal off the bottom of the deck. You might get caught.
>
> As always,
>
> Your father.

The Cap'n had been a strange man, given alternately to restlessness and moody silences; a man who welcomed action when the occasion demanded; coldly analytical in emergencies; commanding more respect than affection and having little of Jeff's sense of humor. He had his own philosophy, which had left its imprint on his son, and when the going was hard or bogged down in monotonous routine, his favorite expression was: "Things happen." To this Jeff made an addition: "Sometimes you have to help them happen." That was one reason why he always carried large sums of cash when he had it. Money caused things to happen.

And cash could be useful in other ways when a check was only so much paper; like he hoped it might be tonight as he gave the key to his safe-deposit box to the hotel cashier.

"I'd like to have that envelope you're holding for me," he told her. There were five one-thousand-dollar bills in the envelope. Jeff verified the contents cautiously, as Hans was loitering nearby, smiled and made his way to the other end of the desk.

"I'm expecting a friend of mine," he told the room clerk. "A Mr. Henry Smith. I'd like to engage a room for him; one directly opposite my own if possible."

"Certainly, Mr. Gorman," the clerk replied. He consulted his files. "That room is vacant."

Jeff very casually removed a folded ten-dollar bill from a vest pocket and slipped it beneath a blotter on the desk.

"Would it be possible for me to sign the register for him and take the key?" he asked. The clerk looked at the blotter. A poker party, he decided.

"Well, it's rather unusual, but in your case I'll make an exception, Mr. Gorman."

Jeff took the key and that of his own room and, with Hans on his heels, made his way to the elevator and ascended to the seventh floor. Hans got off with him and, as he expected, paced down the corridor beside him.

"Nice night," Hans remarked. Jeff inserted the key in his own door and opened it.

"I'll just go in and have a look around," Steele's agent declared.

Jeff turned and thrust the other key into the man's hand. "That's your room over there," he said. The man stared stupidly at the key and then looked across the hall to compare the number on the door with that on the key. Jeff took advantage of his shadow's momentary distraction to step into his own room and slam the door behind him, locking it.

CHAPTER III.

ALLIES JOIN UP.

HANS would have been even more unhappy than he was on being left standing in the corridor could he have observed Jeff's next actions. Consulting a telephone number in a small black notebook which he always carried, Jeff then buried both his head and the telephone beneath a pillow and placed a call for San Francisco.

The suave, slightly condescending tone of an obviously English butler answered when the connection was established: "Mr. Masterson's residence."

Jeff had never heard of Mr. Masterson, but this surprised him not at all. "I'd like to speak too Mr. H. Patrick Handley," he said. "Thomas Jefferson Gorman calling."

"I regret to say that you have the wrong telephone number, sir," Jeff was told. "However, inasmuch as the connection has been established, I will see if I can locate Mr. Handley's proper number in the directory for you."

Jeff was momentarily perplexed; then he grinned. Possibly Mr. Masterson and Mr. Handley were one and the same, but not publicly. Or maybe they only met in the back room. He waited patiently and was rewarded by hearing a very British voice come over the wire:

"Mr. Handley doesn't live here, but he just happens to be an acquaintance of mine," the man said. "Odd, isn't it?"

"A striking coincidence," Jeff agreed. "You don't know where I could reach him?"

"Unfortunately, he's out of town, I happen to know," Jeff was informed. "Be glad to pass along any message when I see him; just in case you'd like to leave your number or anything like that."

"This is Thomas Jefferson Gorman speaking," Jeff said, repressing his laughter to the best of his ability. The English, he decided once again, were so very cautious. "I am at the Golden Fleece Hotel in Denver, Colorado. Just recently returned from Shanghai, where I met a good friend of Mr. Handley's, a Mr. John Smith-Fosdick. Don't happen to know him, do you?"

"Can't say as I do, old man."

"Too bad," Jeff replied. "He's a British agent."

"I say—this is the telephone, you know."

"Or, pardon me," said Jeff. "Well, anyway, John said he was going to write Handley about me; suggested I look Handley up. I got quite friendly with a former old flame of his. A young lady by the name of Nada. Apparently she hasn't any other name and as a matter of fact she didn't know Handley as Handley at all. She called him—"

"Yes, veddy interestin'," Jeff was interrupted. "As you would say: 'O. K. What's up?' "

"An unregistered helium field near the Mexican border and a Nazi agent named Steele," said Jeff. He gave a brief description of his night's adventures, concluding: "I just happened to think that the British government might be interested in the possibilities of there being a stray helium field."

"Well, of course, I wouldn't know anything of that," Jeff was told. "Naturally, all this means nothing to me, but I'm always glad to meet a friend of old Handley's. Just as it happens, I was planning a trip to Denver anyway, so I'll drop in on you in the morning."

"Quite a drop," Jeff commented. "Be careful of that first step."

"Ha!" There was a slight pause on the San Francisco end of the wire. "Joke, I presume."

"You'll die laughing about midnight," Jeff said. "By the way, what will I call you when you get here."

"Oh, just call me Handley," he was informed coolly. "More convenient, don't you think?"

"By all means," said Jeff, replacing the receiver in the midst of a slight daze.

Jeff took a moment to reorganize his thoughts and then cautiously opened the door. The door of the room across the corridor also opened and Hans appeared. Jeff stepped quickly across and Hans put his hand in his coat where he evidently carried a gun in an arm holster. "No more tricks," he warned.

"I just wanted you to be comfortable," Jeff said. He stepped inside the room. "Whenever anyone is keeping an eye on me I like to have the eye-keeper in a position where I can keep an eye on him."

Hans followed this trend of thought in some confusion and Jeff felt that he was in a position to appreciate confusion after his recent talk with Handley. It was probably the Handley influence that made him speak that way.

"Nice room you have here," Jeff commented. He looked about. "Hey, what's that in the waste-paper basket?"

"What?" Hans asked suspiciously, keeping his eyes on Jeff, who bent over the basket and whistled sharply.

"Wet blood," he said. "What the hell have you been doing in here?"

Hans' eyes darted to the basket, and Jeff bolted for the open door, slamming it behind him. Quickly, he locked his own door and started down the hall on the run, Hans right behind him. "Hey, I wanna look at your room," the man shouted.

"I know it," Jeff said. "Some other time."

He rang both the up and down elevator signals, then leaned against the wall as Hans darted around the corner. "Listen," the man panted, "this is your last warning. No more tricks. Now come on back to your room."

"Why?" Jeff stalled.

"Because I say so; that's why."

Jeff shrugged. "Here's the elevator now; you can't very well pull a gun on me in public."

It was the up car, and as Jeff stepped in he flipped the operator a silver dollar and took up his stance at the side of the car opposite the boy.

"Gee, thanks, Mr. Gorman," the boy said as Hans stepped into the car beside Jeff. The boy stepped on the foot pedal, releasing the automatic door.

"My friend here wants to go upstairs," Jeff remarked. He winked and stepped sidewise through the door just as the door reached his side of the car. "But I don't!"

He heard Hans protest, but the car continued up. Once started, operating regulations would not permit the boy to descend until he had reached the top floor.

THE operator of Elevator No. 3 smiled broadly as he caught the green signal light for Floor 7. He crossed his fingers and reached for the seventh-floor button on the control panel with an exuberance of gesture suggestive of a man throwing dice.

Of his two passengers, the thin, sulky-mouthed and spoiled-looking young man watched this motion with idle, disinterested eyes. His companion, however, was amused. Smiling, she addressed the elevator boy: "Seven must be your lucky number."

He turned to answer her with a wide, eager grin. "It is this week, Miss Ray," he said. "Mr. Gorman lives on seven."

She laughed. "I take it Mr. Gorman is a man of liberal tendencies."

"You said it, Miss Ray," the boy replied. "He's the fastest man with a buck I ever saw."

There were bells in her voice when she laughed, and it was evident the elevator boy highly approved of Miss Ray, who was possessed of a pert, upturned nose, light-brown hair and wide, cool gray eyes.

"I hope you land your fish," she said, ignoring the fact that her escort made no effort to conceal his disapproval of the conversation. Despite his ill humor, however, he watched the door with attention as it opened on Floor 7 to admit Jeff.

"Good evening, Mr. Gorman," the boy said with undisguised elation.

"Hi-ya, Johnny," Jeff replied in a tone of casual friendliness. His eyes flicked over the two other occupants of the lift, lingering almost imperceptibly on the girl. He didn't stare. Had she not been observing him intently she would hardly have been aware of his gaze; but, watching him as she was, she was startled. It seemed ridiculous, but she felt that she had been photographed and classified, the record filed away in the back of his mind so that if he ever saw her again, anywhere, he would search through the files and tell himself: "Oh, yes—the girl I saw in the elevator of the Golden Fleece Hotel at Denver."

Jeff produced a silver dollar. He flipped it into the air with a lazy motion, catching it on the back of his closed fist. "One will get you two we collect an even number of passengers before we get downstairs."

Johnny's expectant grin widened. "That's a bet, Mr. Gorman."

The girl and her companion exchanged glances, hers amused, his speculative. Both turned attentive eyes back to their fellow passenger.

An expression which might have been one of secret amusement played across Jeff's face as the elevator reached the ground floor without a single stop. "You're my Nemesis, Johnny," he said, adding another silver dollar to the one in his hand and dropping them both into the elevator boy's pocket as he stepped from the car. "I just can't seem to win a bet from you."

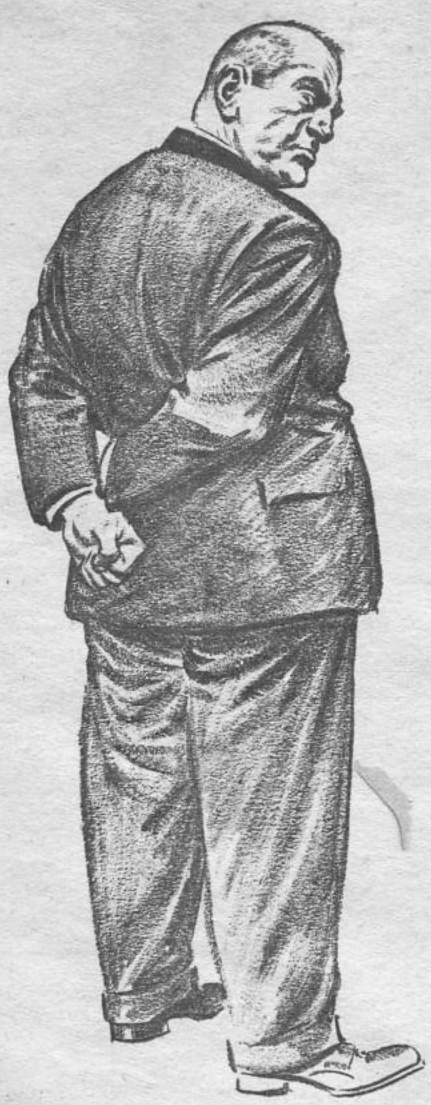
The girl's laughter pealed out again. "Johnny, that wasn't fair," she said. "You passed three lights."

The boy blushed. "No fair peekin', either, Miss Ray," he said. "Anyway, Mr. Gorman could afford it. He carries a bundle of hay in his pocket thick enough to feed a horse. Swell guy—say, he'll bet on anything."

"He sounds interesting." She smiled. "What's he do to collect such an imposing bundle of hay, to quote your apt expression, Johnny?"

"I dunno that either, Miss Ray," Johnny said. "He's only been here three-four days. Bought a car the day he got here; I think maybe he's been lookin' at real estate or something like that."

Ray, who had already left the elevator, beckoned churlishly to the girl. "Come on, Bobbie," he commanded.



HERR STEELE

"You might try to control your bubbling interest in strangers—after all, it's none of your business."

"Oh, George, don't be such a prig!" she exclaimed in disgust as they moved off.

Johnny jerked his head after them and spoke to the starter. "Gee, that guy Ray is a washout. Say! I just took Cash Gorman for another two bucks."

"I'll have to dock you, Johnny," the starter declared. "You passed up three lights."

"Nuts," Johnny growled. He produced one of Jeff's silver dollars. "Here's your cut."

"I can't figure that fellow out," the starter said, pocketing the dollar. "Maybe he just likes action. But you can't tell me he doesn't know what you guys are doing. Every time he steps in an elevator it goes either straight up or straight down—nonstop!"

Johnny stared at the starter. "Maybe that's what he wants!" he exclaimed. "Maybe he's got claust— Ah, maybe he just don't like crowds!"

CHAPTER IV.

CASH CONFUSES NADA.

"LET'S find a night club and do a little dancing," Jeff suggested when he rejoined Nada Gerling.

"No, thanks," she replied. "Not tonight."

"Drink?" he asked. Hans had not yet reappeared and he was anxious to get Nada off some place by herself for a private talk before Steele's agent relocated him.

"No, thank you; I can't, really," she said, looking at him appealingly. It was apparent that she was not supposed to reach terms of too great intimacy with him.

"You *can't* go with me?" Jeff asked. "And why not? And if I just leave by myself? Someone is supposed to keep an eye on me, according to what your bilious-looking boss said, and you're the only one around."

Nada scanned the lobby in quick alarm. "Where *is* Hans?"

Jeff shrugged. "I just can't seem to

keep track of him," he said. "The man has a passion for wandering into strange rooms and riding up and down on elevators. Eccentric type."

Nada fastened shrewd, contemplative eyes on him. "I don't think Mr. Steele is going to like you," she said, arising. "Under the circumstances I'll be delighted to go with—" She broke off, smiling: "I guess Hans must have become tired of elevator riding."

Jeff looked around in disgust to find his portly shadow approaching. "I suppose I won't have the pleasure of your company, then?"

"I don't think I had better even sit here with you; I am getting exceedingly wary of you, Mr. Gorman, and I don't want to be involved in the event you create a situation which might be disturbing to Herr Steele," she murmured, adding aloud: "I'm tired. I think I'll go up to my room; but thanks, anyway, for the invitation."

"Don't mention it," Jeff said. "I enjoyed the evening immensely myself. By the way, what's your room number? I'll call you in the morning."

"It's 1018," she replied, moving toward the elevators. She lowered her voice. "Don't try to see me tonight." Extending her hand, she added in a normal tone: "Good night."

Finding Hans right behind them, Jeff, took Nada's hand in his own, pleasantly, and said: "Good night." She stepped into the elevator and Jeff turned away. So did Hans, who was practically on his heels and thus was in front of Jeff when they faced the lobby. Jeff smiled and stepped backward into the lift.

"Right up, Johnny," he commanded sharply.. "Tenth floor."

"Yes, *sir,* Mr. Gorman." The elevator boy grinned. Hans whirled around just in time to see the door close in his face.

Jeff smiled at the startled woman. "You'll have to forgive me, Nada," he said. "I'm a very persistent suitor." Turning to the elevator boy, he slipped a bill into his hand.

"Is the house dick on duty?" he asked.

His eyes wide, Johnny nodded.

"O. K., Johnny," Jeff said in a quick, decisive voice. "I'm depending on you in a very important matter. Keep your mouth shut and do just as I tell you."

Johnny looked bewildered, but he nodded.

"Locate the house detective quickly when you get downstairs. Do it yourself. If the starter says anything, I'll fix it up for you later. Tell the house dick to go to the eleventh floor and walk downstairs to ten—so the elevator door won't open and close. At ten, he is to locate the corridor in which 1018 is located. Tell him to approach it quietly and look around the corner. He'll find something that will interest him."

"Yes, sir," the elevator boy replied. "I'll have him up there in five minutes."

Nada stared at Jeff in sullen fright. "What are you trying to do?" she demanded.

"Don't bother your pretty head about it," Jeff told her, taking her by the arm.

"Take me downstairs again," she commanded the elevator boy.

"Open that door, Johnny," Jeff said. "Everything's on the up and up."

The door opened and Jeff propelled Nada through it, despite her strenuous efforts to remain in the car. "Get going," he flung over his shoulder at Johnny.

Nada opened her handbag and reached into it with her free hand.

"Touch that gun and I'll break your arm," Jeff said, squeezing her wrist in a viselike grisp. There was steel in his voice. She threw a startled, frightened glance at him and was panicked by the hard, bright light in his eyes. "I . . . I think you would," she stammered.

He nodded. "You people play for keeps," he said. "So do I. Now get along to your room."

She went submissively. In front of the door, she stopped. "I've forgotten my key," she said. "I'll *have* to go downstairs again."

Jeff seized her handbag and searched it. There was no key. Slipping her gun into his off-side pocket, he imprisoned her arm and took a jackknife from his pocket, opening the leather punch with his teeth. With one hand, he jimmied the lock.

"Elementary, Mrs. Watson," he said, shoving her into the room.

"What's your racket?" she demanded. Her mouth was hard, but her eyes gave away her fear. "What did you send for that dick for?"

Jeff grinned. "Do you have a permit for this gun?" he asked, wiping his fingerprints from it with a handkerchief and dropping it back into her handbag.

"You aren't going to do that to me?" she cried. "Please! I'm in this country illegally. They'll send me back to Shanghai."

"And there are people there you don't wish to see," Jeff filled in. He threw her handbag on the bureau top and put one of her arms through his own again. "Now just keep your mouth shut and you'll be O. K. One squawk and you'll go right to the cooler. And now we'll make a little conversation, darling." He raised his voice. "You're the daughter of a White Russian refugee, aren't you?" he asked.

"What if I am?" she asked sullenly. "Don't talk so loud."

"I just wondered," he replied without lowering his voice. "I know how it is—met a few in Shanghai. Tough breaks. Hard going. Living by your wits."

"Please don't talk so loud," she begged. "What are you do—"

There was a crash on the door and the sound of a scuffle in the hall. "What's going on here?" a hard voice demanded. Jeff swung open the door and two struggling men fell through it to the floor of the room. One was Hans; the other, a sandy-haired, athletic-looking young man: the house detective.

"YOU'RE under arrest," the house dick grunted, locking the man called Hans in a leg scissors. Hans reached into his coat for his gun. Jeff leaned swiftly down, grabbed Hans by the hair, tilted his chin back and delivered a paralyzing left straight to the point of the man's jaw. Hans went as limp as an empty sack.

"Thanks," the tow-headed young man declared, getting to his feet. "I'm Jimmy Ranger, the house detective."

They shook hands and the house detective jerked his head toward the prostrate Hans. "I caught him listening at the door. Had his ear glued to it." Importantly, Ranger added: "He wouldn't have got away. I had a leg scissors on him."

"Yes?" Jeff inquired. He reached into Hans' coat and removed the heavy automatic from its shoulder holster and held it out to Ranger.

The young man stared at it. "Cripes!" he exclaimed. "Nobody ever tried to pull a gun on me before."

Jeff smiled. He found himself liking this freckle-faced young man. "I take it you haven't been detecting long."

Ranger's face flushed. "No, I just

graduated from Mines this spring. Engineering." He grinned himself. "I compromised on the detective business because I've got a big appetite." He looked from the man on the floor to Jeff and Nada with quick suspicion.

"Say, who is that guy?" he asked of the inert figure. To Nada, he added: "Your husband?"

Jeff fixed a significant glance on her. She shook her head. "No—I never saw him before."

Ranger turned his suspicious glance to Jeff. "You're Gorman, aren't you?" he asked.

"I'm *Mr.* Gorman," Jeff replied, throwing Ranger psychologically off base. "I recognized this man. That's why I sent for you. He's been following me all day, and when I found he had trailed us to the theater and then followed us home and attempted to enter the same elevator, I became suspicious. I customarily carry large sums of money on my person, and I suspected he intended robbery. I wouldn't be at all surprised if it were found that he has a police record. Also, I seriously doubt if he has a permit to carry a revolver."

Ranger's face lighted up. "Say, that's right; I've really got something on him if he has no permit."

"That's easy to find out," Jeff said. He picked up a pitcher of ice water and unceremoniously dumped it over Hans, who gasped at the shock and sat up, choking feebly.

"Do you have a permit to carry a gun?" Ranger demanded.

"What do you care?" was the sullen reply.

Ranger grinned and produced a pair of handcuffs. "The police will be interested," he said.

Hans glared malevolently at Nada. Jeff turned to her quickly, his back to Ranger, and took both her hands in his, inspecting them swiftly. On her right hand was a sapphire. "Don't be frightened, darling," he said solicitously. "Everything's going to be all right now." With a twist and a hard jerk, he pulled the ring from her finger, drowning her startled "Ouch!" with a loud cough.

"That two-timin' dame's my girl friend," Hans yelled. "I followed her up here to see what was going on, and let me tell you, copper, if you take me in I'll make such a stinkin' scandal for this joint you'll lose your job."

Jeff slipped the ring on Nada's engagement finger and turned around to face Ranger. "Ridiculous," he said. "Miss Gerling is my fiancée. Neither of us has ever seen this man before." Ranger's eyes sought Nada's ring finger.

"O. K., mug," he said to Hans. "Dust off the ice cubes and we'll get along to the station."

"Just a moment," Jeff said. "I've been investigating some properties here which were recommended to me by the Banca California and, naturally, as a businessman, this publicity would be distasteful to me and embarrassing to Miss Gerling. I'd rather not prefer the attempted-robbery charge, and I'm sure the hotel would dislike publicity of that type. I suggest that you simply state you were suspicious of this man's actions and found him to be armed when you investigated. I don't believe he'll say anything because, if he should, it would mean two charges instead of one. Incidentally, it should be quite a tribute to your own alertness and I'll see that the manager hears of my gratitude."

There was admiration in Ranger's eyes as he answered Jeff, saying: "Yes, sir, Mr. Gorman. That's the best way to handle it, all right. Sorry you were disturbed."

"Not at all," Jeff said coolly. Mr. Ranger, he decided, might be very valuable to him. Fumbling in his pocket, he separated a one-hundred-dollar bill from his money. "Your prompt action undoubtedly saved me a considerable sum of money and possible injury to Miss Gerling or myself." He kicked Hans sharply in the ankle, and when the gunman looked down with a howl of anguish, Jeff drew his hand from his pocket and stuffed the one-hundred-dollar bill into Ranger's vest pocket. "Good night."

Ranger grinned and jerked the handcuffed Hans from the room.

"You lousy rat," Nada hissed as the door closed. "You've got me in a terrible jam. Did you see the way he looked at me when I didn't back up that sweetheart play of his?"

"Uh-huh," Jeff said casually. "I also noted that he showed a remarkably fine knowledge of American hoodlum slang for a Nazi agent. There's something rotten in Denmark and it could be, in this particular instance, that it isn't Hitler."

She bit her lip furiously and sank into a chair. "You can't cross up Steele and get away with it," she cried. "You know what he told you—"

Jeff reached into his pocket and took out his wallet. Extracting his passport, he opened it and held it out for her inspection.

"Just in case you didn't know," he said, "I am Thomas Jefferson Gorman!"

"Oh!" she gasped. "I made a mistake. I'll . . . I'll— They'll kill me!"

Jeff looked at her curiously. "Either you're a very good actress or you're telling the truth, and I'll be damned if I know which it is," he said. "However, it seems incredible to me that Nazi agents could make so gross a blunder."

She shrugged contemptuously. "I've dealt with a lot of them," she said. "Often they're stupid. Besides, everything went according to plan tonight at our meeting. It's— I don't understand."

"I love that expression, 'according to plan,'" he said. "I notice Steele used it, too. If George Ray is so important to you all, why didn't any of you know him?"

"A man named Mitchell has been handling all the contacts and field work," she said. "Steele was not to figure actively in it until everything was set up. He has charge of many activities."

"I think you're lying," Jeff said.

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"What did you mean downstairs when you said you didn't think they realized what a dangerous man I was?"

"Stop asking questions," she cried. "When they've found out they've made a mistake, when they learn what a tartar you are, they'll stop at nothing to get you out of the way." She looked at him, pleading with her eyes. "Believe me, I know what I'm talking about. I like you. Why don't you clear out. Take me with you."

Jeff grinned. "Thanks for all the compliments." He looked at her shrewdly. "I might, at that, if you'll tell me what this is all about."

"I'm afraid," she said simply. "You'd probably try to do something about it and we'd both be murdered."

"I was kidnaped," Jeff said. "I could go to the police, you know."

She smiled wisely. "Not you."

"O. K." Jeff shrugged. "Have it your way, but you're getting yourself in a hot spot. Be better to talk than not to talk and you'd make some money. Maybe I would, too."

"No dice," she said. "What's your racket?"

"Oh, I'm just a kind of a financial freebooter," he said. "I go around disguised as a sheep, the better to put the bite on wolves." He motioned to the telephone. "Call your big, brown-eyed boy friend, Steele, and tell him I've been safely tucked away in bed."

She hesitated. Jeff's eyes hardened. "Call him up," he said harshly. "And play it straight; speak English."

He noted the number down in an address book and followed her brief conversation with attentive ears. "Hello," she said. "Nada. He retired at 11:20. He was frightened, but extremely curious about the situation." She listened for a moment, said "Yes," then: "Hans was downstairs when we entered the elevator." She listened again. "No; George Ray. Good night."

Hanging up, she turned to Jeff. "I'm in a terrible jam. If Hans gets out of jail—"

Jeff smiled sympathetically. "Don't worry about that," he said. "I'll hire a lawyer on behalf of Herr Steele and have Hans informed to keep his mouth shut. You'd better pretend nothing happened."

She stared at him. "You are a smooth operator," she said finally. Then, in quick alarm: "You aren't a British agent, are you?"

"Oh, no, nothing so romantic as that," Jeff said. He idly picked up a stocking from the top of the dressing table.

"You can travel a long way on five thousand dollars," Jeff said, approaching her casually. "Clean money, too."

"Five thousand dollars!" she exclaimed. Jeff took a roll of bills from his pocket and held it toward her.

"I'll remember that," she said. She smiled again for the first time since they had come upstairs.

"Just one more thing," Jeff said. Bending over her, he seized both her hands in one of his and slipped the stocking around her head, gagging her. "This is unfortunate but necessary," he apologized, tying her hands and feet with handkerchiefs. "It won't be a comfortable night, I know," he said, putting her on the bed. "Don't struggle so. It won't do any good, and I can't risk your talking to your friends. I have business to do tonight."

He picked up the telephone. "Is Mr. George Ray registered?" he asked.

"Yes, sir," the operator told him. "Shall I ring his room?"

"No, it's too late tonight," Jeff said. "What room is it?"

"No. 812," he was informed.

From the doorway, Jeff shook his head sadly at Nada. "I am sorry, but let this be a lesson to you," he said. "Never pick up strange men."

CHAPTER V.

THE DEAL.

JEFF made his way down to the hotel restaurant and had a leisurely cup of coffee while he methodically turned the events of the evening over in his mind. The only conclusion he reached was that there were possibilities of making money out of an unregistered helium field. The British undoubtedly would be delighted to obtain control of such a field, complete with processing plant.

"I must do my bit for the Allies," Jeff murmured patriotically to himself. Thinking of the manner in which he had done his bit for the Chinese, he even managed to engender a warm feeling that he was becoming quite a potent defender of the democracies in an indirect manner.

The only fly in the ointment, however, was the manner of his meeting with Herr Steele. It still seemed incredible that he could have been involved in this by mistake. Of course, it was not beyond the realm of possibility. German agents had made at least one bad mistake of that kind during the last war in connection with the plot to establish a base in Mexico for operation against the United States. Yet, if it was no mistake, the alternative was equally incredible. Steele must be trying to use him for some purpose.

With a shock, he recalled his China incident. If Nazi and Jap agents were still exchanging information— He considered this, but it seemed to lead nowhere. The Japs had more important things to do than worry about him, and he failed to see where he could be fitted into a Nazi helium-smuggling plot until it suddenly occurred to him that, if they did have any information concerning his activities as something of a free lance in finance, they might have an idea that he could be bought or, possibly, compromised in order to front for them.

He finished his coffee in a troubled mood and then proceeded to the desk to make a few guarded inquiries about the mysterious Mr. Ray, who was, apparently, the only man who had all the answers. The clerk informed him that George Ray and his sister, Roberta, had been at the Golden Fleece for approximately ten days. They were from Oklahoma City.

"Who is he, anyway?" Jeff asked casually. "I heard him being paged tonight and it seems I should know him. The name is vaguely familiar."

"Possibly you knew his father," the clerk suggested. "Old Herman Ray, the oil wildcatter. He brought in one of the big Oklahoma fields."

"Of course," said Jeff. "I thought the name was familiar."

He had never heard of Herman Ray, but from the clerk's tone of voice he assumed that admission of such a fact would have been near to heresy. The Rays, at least, came of respectable parents. Anyway, they had traceable antecedents.

One o'clock in the morning was not socially recognized as a time to go calling, Jeff realized, but then there was no time like the present when business was involved.

"It certainly is involved, too," he thought, strolling down the corridor to Room 812. He paused contemplatively outside the door and hummed a bar of

"Drink To Me Only With Thine Eyes." Then he knocked briskly.

He pressed his ear to the door and heard someone moving around within. A light switch clicked. Then he heard a soft knock on another door, apparently to an adjoining room. A woman's voice answered, indistinguishable.

"Somebody at the door," a man said. "You answer it."

Jeff knocked again with equal briskness. "Just a moment," a feminine voice called. It was a nice voice. Jeff decided he was going to enjoy this interview more than he had expected.

"Who's there?" the voice asked again, closer this time.

"Telegram for Mr. Ray," Jeff said.

"All right—slip it under the door."

That almost stopped Jeff. "I'm sorry, miss," he said finally. "You'll have to sign for it."

The door was unlocked and opened cautiously. Jeff was pleasantly surprised to see the girl with the light-brown hair and the gray eyes whom he had noticed early in the evening on the elevator. He approved instantly of Miss Ray. This wasn't mutual.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, starting to slam the door. Jeff put his foot in the jam and shoved expertly with his shoulder. "Stop—get out," the girl cried.

"I'm sorry to be so informal," Jeff said, stepping into the room, "but I have something important to discuss with your brother. My name is Thomas Jefferson Gorman."

There was no sign of Ray in the room, nor could Jeff see any signs of life through the open door of the adjoining room. He raised his hands over his head and kicked the door shut behind him.

"I'm unarmed," he said, turning his head and finding George Ray, as he had expected, standing in a position where the door, when open, had sheltered him. Ray held a heavy automatic in his hand. He was the sullen-faced young man who accompanied the girl when Jeff had first seen her.

"What do you want?" Ray demanded. He didn't lower the automatic.

"You are Mr. George Ray, aren't you?" Jeff asked.

Ray looked at his sister and she nodded. "What of it?" Ray asked.

"I just wanted to talk to you about some helium properties in New Mexico," Jeff said. "In the Ladrones."

Ray's eyes popped. He waved the automatic toward a chair. "Sit down," he said. "With your hands on your knees."

Jeff permitted his eyes to roam pleasantly over Roberta Ray and did as he was bid. The girl blushed and hastily wrapped around her the house coat which she had donned to cover her nightgown. Jeff thought the blush was very becoming and smiled. Miss Ray chilled with a look. She was, Jeff thought, a very becoming young lady. And very much alive-looking. Her brother, he didn't like. George Ray had a weak face and he was showing signs of distinct uneasiness.

"I don't know anything about a helium field in New Mexico or any place else," Ray said. "However, I do have some property in the Ladrones—or my company does. If there's helium gas there, I'd like to know about it."

Jeff sank back in the chair and replied: "That's interesting; now I'll tell *you* a little bedtime story."

Without dramatics he proceeded to relate what had happened to him that evening without mentioning what had happened to Nada or the guard.

"Oh!" Bobbie Ray gasped when he

told about Nada putting the gun to his back and addressing him as "Mr. Ray." Ray sent an admonishing glance at his sister and told Jeff to go on.

As he spoke, Jeff stretched his legs out comfortably and sank lower and lower in the chair until he was practically sitting on his spine. His feet were very close to the bed on which Ray sat, and in the middle of his description of what happened at Steele's house, he interrupted himself to ask: "May I have a glass of water?"

Ray looked startled. He turned to his sister. "Get a glass of water, will you, Bobbie?" Jeff raised himself in his chair with his hands and kicked expertly with his right foot, catching Ray's wrist as the man looked toward his sister. "Ow!" Ray exclaimed. The automatic flew out of his hand and Jeff jumped on it.

"Excuse it, please," he said. "I don't like to have people point guns at me." He removed the clip, ejected the cartridge from the chamber, memorized the serial number of the weapon and tossed it on the bed.

As he resumed his story, he noticed that George Ray seemed more nervous than ever and Bobbie, on the other hand, was looking at him with more interest than either alarm or surprise.

"So there we are, Mr. Ray," he commented at the conclusion. "Now suppose you tell me all about it."

"Fantastic story," Ray commented, but every gesture and expression gave him away. "Ridiculous. Are you sure you haven't been drinking, Mr. Gorman?"

"I don't drink," Jeff replied briefly.

"Then I must assume that this is some practical joke," Ray said. "Either that or you are attempting some new form of blackmail."

Jeff shrugged. "O. K. If you don't want to talk, I'll have to see the police."

Bobbie Ray darted toward him and grasped his arm. There were tears in her eyes. "Please, Mr. Gorman," she said. "If you're a gentleman, you'll forget all about this."

Jeff grinned. "I like your nice gray eyes, lady, and I'd love to oblige, but I'm no gentleman."

"Shut up, sis," Ray said.

"You can't afford to have him go to the police," she cried. "Tell him the truth. Maybe he can help us."

"Who are you, anyway?" Ray asked.

"You know my name," Jeff said. "I don't have any particular business; anything that looks interesting and profitable, I'll take a whirl at. Why don't you tell me what's going on? You're in hard trouble, fellow."

Ray buried his head in his hands. Finally he looked up. "It's true," he said. "You tell him, Bobbie."

Ray himself got up and began pacing nervously up and down the room. Jeff watched him with disgusted eyes. The man apparently was going all to pieces. Jeff decided he would trust Ray about as far as he could throw a gunboat. The man had a weak, dissolute face and greedy eyes. He certainly didn't look at all like his sister.

"This man Mitchell—Henry Mitchell—came to George about a year ago," Bobbie Ray said, pulling her chair nearer to Jeff's and speaking hopefully. "He had money and he pretended to be a New York financier in New Mexico for his health. He said he was anxious to interest himself in something that would keep his mind busy and at the same time be profitable. He—"

Jeff interrupted her. "Not so fast, please," he grinned. "Who is Mitchell?"

"He's Herr Steele's agent," she told him. "He—"

Jeff held up his hand. "Suppose you start at the beginning. Who are you folks and how did you come to be in New Mexico and so on?"

As she talked, Jeff watched her with keen interest and came to the conclusion that his first impression wasn't wrong. This was a real girl. Courageous, smart. He liked her.

The story she told bore out what the man named Steele had told him. Ray was supposed to proceed to San Francisco from Albuquerque and to turn over a large amount of stock which he had been purchasing for Steele's account from various small investors in the Ladrones Petroleum Co., Inc.

Instead, he had come to Denver in the hopes of raising money which would enable him to free himself from the control of Steele, who was a Nazi agent. They had never met, all of the transactions on behalf of Steele having been made by Henry Mitchell, his agent in the field.

The story led back to their father's death. He had left his son and daughter comfortably well off, but their inheritance was not what they had been led to expect. Always a gambler, his speculations had lost him his interest in the Oklahoma oil fields which he had wildcatted, and practically the entire estate he left them was invested in safe but low-interesting-bearing bonds. There was one exception: a substantial interest in one of the oil companies which he had formed during his life, Pueblo State Oil Corp. at Roswell, New Mexico.

Reading between the lines, Jeff came to the conclusion that George Ray had run through his own inheritance and, probably, that of his sister, too. The Pueblo State Oil stock he had not touched because nobody would buy it. A promotion of the exuberant 1920s, its principal assets were large land holdings which originally had been presumed to be potentially rich oil property. It had a number of wells in operation, but they had never been large producers, and in its efforts to bring in a rich strike the company had incurred, during the later part of the liberal '20s, fixed obligations which were so heavy that no dividend had ever been paid, even on preferred stock.

IT was to this company which George Ray had turned to recoup his fortunes after running through his inheritance. He was an engineer by profession, although he had never worked at it much, and with the help of his father's old friends on the board of directors and the weight of the position of his sister and himself as the principal stockholders, he had obtained an executive position in the company and eventually the presidency. Neither of these posts had paid George what he looked upon as money.

Once president, he therefore had persuaded the bondholders, who were faced with the alternative of winding up with a completely dead horse on their hands, to permit him to drill fields which had never before been attempted. Deep drilling had been necessary, and although he met with some success, the returns were not sufficient to have justified the cost. Roberta didn't say so, but it was obvious that Ray, confident of success, had appropriated funds for his personal use with the idea of later making good out of anticipated profits. The result was that when Henry Mitchell had appeared on the scene, he found Ray in a receptive mood for almost any proposition. He was faced with jail.

Among properties which Pueblo

State Oil owned was land in the Ladrone Mountains which the elder Ray had bought, sight unseen. There Ray, with the last funds available for new drilling, had made his last stab at developing a new field. He got natural gas, little oil. The wells were capped and sealed.

There was no market of any size near enough to warrant construction of a pipe line. No effort was made to even test the product for helium. The domestic helium market was supplied to capacity by existing producers. Foreign exports were forbidden. Processing plants were costly.

Mitchell offered an out. He suggested that he be permitted privately to test the gas for helium content. If found, he intimated, he had influence at Washington; he could arrange a foreign market. The matter was to be a secret between Ray and himself. He would provide fresh capital for reorganization of the company, squeeze out other big shareholders before the new plan was announced.

Obviously, Nazi geologists had been exploring isolated sections in the Southwest for likely helium land and Mitchell already knew the Ladrones wells were such when he made his offer. Ray accepted. When Mitchell announced helium was present in the gas in high ratio, Ray confessed his own use of company funds, stipulated that Mitchell was to cover his shortages. Mitchell, already aware, or at least suspicious, on this score, acceded. The plan was put through. The majority of stockholders were glad to get rid of their holdings at a sacrifice.

It was only then that Mitchell revealed his true identity and his plan. Ray was in too deep to pull out. As president of the company he then announced that a new, rich field had been developed, and on the basis of the new deposits a contract to supply all the crude oil for the Central American Steamship Co. had been signed.

The dormant stock went up and Mitchell sold substantial holdings to finance the construction of the cracking plant, the Nazis needing all the foreign exchange they could get and not wanting to tie up any of it unnecessarily. Later, it was let out that the new deposits might not prove as large as was expected; the company might have to go into the market to buy crude oil with which to fulfill its contract with Central American Steamship. Stock dropped and Mitchell began buying back so that

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no unnecessary dividends would have to be paid outsiders. The board of directors, meanwhile, had been entirely replaced by fronts for Mitchell and, through him, Steele.

Jeff whistled admiringly. "Very smooth," he commented. "Your brother certainly put his foot in the bucket."

Roberta looked at Jeff appealingly. "I know it sounds terrible, but George didn't steal any money. He just made a mistake. He had bad luck and he just didn't know what to do. Besides, he hadn't any idea Mitchell was a Nazi."

"How are they going to deliver this stuff?" Jeff asked her. He looked at George contemptuously out of the corner of an eye. All Ray did was walk up and down smoking cigarettes and looking worried while his sister did his explaining for him.

"In oil trucks. The helium is placed in tubes and the tubes go into the tank compartment. The trucks deliver the stuff to Galveston where Central American Steamship Co. accepts it as oil for ship use. The Nazis control the steamship company. Then the tubes go to Mexico, where they've made a deal with someone. There the helium is transferred to Russian carriers."

"Neat," Jeff said. "Who does the work?"

"Mexicans," Roberta answered. She was rubbing her hands together nervously and watching him with anxious eyes. "Mitchell got them."

"What have you been trying to do up here?" Jeff asked.

"Trying to raise money," she said.

"What good would that do?" Jeff asked.

"Well, we thought maybe we could interest friends of ours so they would back us up in trying to get control of the company. Then we could throw Mitchell out. It would be wonderful every way if we could, because then we could sell the helium legitimately. We've learned Great Britain is trying to have the embargo on helium lifted, and it's almost certain that if big new deposits are announced, the interior department would do it."

Bobbie Ray put her hand on his and turned big gray eyes on him. "You won't tell the police what happened tonight, will you? Please," she begged. "We're trying so hard to work out of this."

Jeff winked. "O. K.," he said. "However, what good would it do you to get control of outstanding stock? Your brother would only get shot if he tried to oust these boys. Steele said that tonight."

She bit her lip and the tears started again. "It's our only hope," she said. "George just has to take that chance."

"Whose idea was this—George's or yours?" Jeff asked. "Coming up here, I mean."

She hesitated. "George's," she said, but Jeff got the idea it was hers. "You see, we thought maybe a third party with clean hands might be able to accomplish what we want, and George could just disappear for a while, turning his interests over to the third party. Steele wouldn't dare attack someone with a good position in business or banking."

"Yeah, I see," Jeff said. "You certainly don't mind wishing a lot of trouble off on someone else, do you, George?"

Ray spoke for the first time since the conversation had begun. "Well, can you think of anything better?"

"George!" the girl said, staring at him angrily. "You ought to thank Mr. Gorman."

Jeff turned this information over in his mind for a moment. "Have you been having any luck getting money?" he asked.

"Not much," she said. "You see, we're afraid to tell anyone everything that has happened; at least, until we are in a strong position ourselves. We wouldn't cheat—" She sighed. "It's so hard; I hardly know which way to turn."

Jeff smiled at her. "Cheer up," he said. "Something always happens. Meanwhile, let's just keep this situation open while we can. I'll keep on pretending to be George as long as possible and that will give you more time."

"Oh, that would be wonderful!" she exclaimed.

AT the door he paused with his hand on the knob, suddenly suspicious. "Say, weren't you supposed to be going to San Francisco for the purpose of turning stock over to Steele?" he asked.

She nodded. "Yes, of course. I told you that."

"So did Steele," he commented dryly. "What are you turning stock over to him for if you're so damned anxious to get control of the company?" His eyes were cold as ice as he looked at her. "You wouldn't sucker me, would you, darling? You wouldn't, for instance, play on my sentimentality with your big gray eyes so I'd front for your brother for a few days and give him time to raise enough dough to duck for South America, stock and all?"

He lowered his voice to a flat, ominous note. "You wouldn't have tipped a bellboy to come up to me with a phony message while he was paging your brother, so I'd be mistaken for Ray at this rendezvous?"

She gasped and looked at her brother. Jeff thought Ray seemed a little pale, but that might be anger as the man's sullen face twisted into a scowl. "Don't talk to my sister that way," he said threateningly. "If you don't believe us, go to hell. We don't need your help."

"I wouldn't believe *you* on a stack of Bibles," Jeff said pointedly. "I have believed Miss Ray, *so far*."

"It wasn't our stock," she said quickly. "You see, Mitchell gave us the money to buy up stock for them from various private holders after the price was depressed. That was the stock we were going to turn over to Steele."

"What was it doing in a San Francisco bank?" Jeff asked. "Why couldn't it have been made over to Mitchell?"

"It was stock owned mostly by Californians and people in the Northwest; small holdings," she said. "George made a trip out there about a month ago and began buying it up privately through third parties at bargain prices. That was part of the scheme, to put the price up and sell and push it down and buy, getting operating funds that way for the helium plant. Steele wasn't out there when George was, and it was considered better to leave it there. Steele didn't trust Mitchell, I guess, and didn't want him to have too much stock himself. At the time, Steele didn't know what dummies the stock would be held through, you see?"

Jeff nodded. "Yeah, I get you. And this stock gives them complete control of the company?"

"Yes," she said. "You see, that's why we wanted to try to raise funds. If we could pay Mitchell the money he advanced us to buy this stock, we could keep it and that would give us control. Then, if some third party would take over and vote it for us—somebody with clean hands—he could get Mitchell out."

Jeff nodded. "Or some third party could just take the stock himself and pool interests with you?"

"That would be heavenly," she said. "But we can't get anybody. We're afraid to tell the whole story to anyone. And as it is, they think the company's a dog."

"How much do you need?" Jeff asked.

"Not much," she replied. "That is, not much when you consider how much is involved altogether. You see, a lot of people who buy oil stocks will hang onto them as long as the company seems active like we have been—even when things look bad. They hope for a big strike. So lots of them hung on or held out for too much, suspicious because somebody wanted to buy.

"Also, Steele's superiors are short on foreign exchange and they can't afford to tie too much up in this venture. That's been the reason for all this maneuvering. We really only need one hundred and thirty-five thousand dollars to give us enough stock, in combination with some of the other independent shareholders, to control the company."

Jeff blinked. That was just fifteen thousand dollars short of his entire bankroll. Coincidence was certainly raising its ugly head in all directions tonight.

"You do believe me, don't you?" she pleaded.

"Certainly, now that you've explained it," Jeff said. "I may even be able to help you in more ways than one."

Ray rushed in and grasped his hand. "Thanks, old man," he said. "I'll never be able to repay you for this. Believe me, if I can ever do anything for you—"

"Save it," Jeff said dryly. He threw the clip from the automatic back on the bed. "Here, you may need this."

Jeff was more cordial in his departing message to Bobbie Ray. As he made his way toward the elevator he found himself thinking almost wholly about her. Suddenly he stopped short and whistled softly. "Don't tell me, Mr. Gorman," he said aloud, "that you are being suckered into something by liquid gray eyes and a hank of hair!"

CHAPTER VI.

BALANCING THE BOOKS.

ONE of the heritages from his father, the Cap'n, for which Jeff was always grateful was his personal appreciation of stray thoughts. Always such stray thoughts caused him to strike a sudden trial balance. And frequently these sudden balances led to operations which were profitable; but at least they prevented him from making sucker mistakes. And if there was one thing Cash Gorman relished more than life itself, it was his reputation of being a smooth operator to whom the angles were as obvious as they were to the designer.

One of the reasons for his unique ability to sight the angles was his complete willingness to give brain room to a stray thought. He'd stop in the middle of a table-stake stud game for telephone-number pots to analyze an idea. He had one such idea now, thus he went through his "balancing of the books," completely oblivious that he was tracing his steps toward his room and a well-earned, and desired, rest. He was unmindful of his surroundings and of the entreating expression of the elevator boy—a relief man who didn't often get a chance at Cash Gorman and his carefully rigged bets, which made all elevator boys allies of his.

Jeff skipped hurriedly through the events of the evening, mentally appraising each step, dotting his mental jottings with appropriate question marks. He reached two conclusions. The first was that Steele was a Nazi agent.

"If he is," mused Jeff, "I'm a very

hot potato for him. I know too much about his plans and therefore I can expect an attempt on my life. Keep your guard high, Jeff, old boy, and your eye peeled for a thrust below the belt. No fifth-column stuff with me! But if there is no attempt on my life, this conclusion is false."

Then a smile broke across his face.

"Mr. Gorman," he said to himself, "if this is a swindle, it is a honey. But then it couldn't be. No. There's a missing factor. And yet tonight's performance was too, too realistic. Somebody's been workin' these diggin's. There must be gold in these here now hills."

Jeff reached the door of his room and smiled when he thought of Roberta Ray. To such a late visitor she was pleasantly confidential. Jeff discovered that his door was not locked. Instantly he was cautiously attentive. He was always careful to lock doors.

He pushed it slightly ajar, reached inside and flattened himself against the wall of the corridor. Nothing happened. He pushed the door open a little more and peered through the crack at the hinged side. Nobody was in sight. He entered slowly, cautiously. With one gesture he flipped the switch on in the bathroom and turned the key in the closet lock; both were in a small foyer.

Poking his head around the corner to get a full view of the room, he received a nasty shock. There, lying on his bed, was a woman, her face a mass of blood. Jeff retreated to the hallway door and locked it. He leaped back in the room beside the girl on the bed and bent over her. It was the hotel's public stenographer. He had dictated several letters to her since his arrival.

Jeff examined the girl quickly. She was breathing, but she had been badly beaten. One eye was swelling. Her lips were puffed and bleeding, her cheek cut. Jeff swore. "Brass knuckles."

He wet a towel and bathed her face. Her eyes open and quick terror filled them. She cringed away from him. "Don't hit me again," she cried.

"Shhh," he cautioned. "I just got here, honey; I didn't hit you." He patted her hand reassuringly. "You're safe now. Take it easy. I'll get you some water and patch up those cuts."

He doctored her face and made a cold compress for her eye. "What happened?" he asked finally.

"I wanted to tell you something," she said, recognizing him. Fright showed in her eyes again. "You mustn't tell anyone I told you." Jeff shook his head and she went on: "Something happened the other night. After you dictated that letter to Martin Rossi in San Francisco—"

"Yes," put in Jeff, "saying I wasn't looking for investments for—"

"—for one hundred and fifty thousand dollars," the girl added. "Well, it was right after you left my desk. Well, first I was scared and wanted to tell you; then I got really frightened and didn't. Tonight I got so scared again I felt I had to tell you, so I came here to tell you about it."

"About what?" Jeff asked. "No, never mind that yet. What happened here?"

"Well," she said, "I was scared to death that somebody was watching me. He said there would be. Well, I came up the freight elevator, and as I turned the corner in the corridor coming to your room, I found a man jimmying the lock. Evidently, he got the door open just as I came around the corner. I was frightened sick and made a noise. That's all I remember, except he hit me."

"When was this?" Jeff asked. This might mean that Steele already was suspicious of him and that would be bad.

The girl looked at her watch. "About ten minutes ago."

Jeff stepped over to the bureau and opened the top drawer. He was perturbed rather than pleased to see that his diamond studs and several other pieces of valuable jewelry were undisturbed. He picked up his brief case, and the story it told him was what he had expected. The minute piece of candle wax which he always dropped on the zipper in such a way that it would have to be broken if the brief case was opened had not been broken. The girl might have interrupted a robbery or a search. Jeff preferred to believe it was the latter.

Jeff picked up the telephone grimly and called 1018. Nada answered.

"Quick work," Jeff said dryly. "I thought I did a rather good job of tying you up."

Nada laughed and Jeff felt quick admiration for the manner in which she accepted her recent discomfort as a part of the dangerous game she was playing. "You slipped up on one, Mr. Gorman," she told him. "Hans, naturally, didn't report from jail, so they sent someone down to investigate. Really, I'm disappointed in you, seeing that you took down our friend's telephone number when I called him. I thought you certainly would try to report on Hans' behalf."

"I'm in no mood for humor; not just at present," Jeff said. "I'm sorry you decided you didn't want the money I offered you, and I think you'll be sorry, too."

"I didn't turn it down," she replied quickly. "I mean I have to be cautious."

"It didn't take you long to reveal my identity," Jeff said.

"I didn't," she protested. "I didn't tell him a thing. I just said you said you lived on the tenth floor, too, and that when you left the elevator with me, you saw me to my door and then seized me, bound me and searched my room."

"That's a nice story, Nada," he told her, "but you have to think of something better to tell the police." There was a grim note in his voice.

"The police!" she cried. "But you told me you wouldn't call in the police."

"That was before your boy friend murdered a girl in my room," Jeff said. He heard her gasp.

"He didn't!" she exclaimed, panic in her voice. "He told me he just knocked her out."

Jeff laughed. "That's all I wanted to know, darling. Don't worry about the police and don't tell me any more lies."

There was a short silence on the other end of the wire. "You mean you just said that to startle me?" she finally asked in a surly voice.

"Certainly," Jeff replied pleasantly. "I always like to know who's been looking through my papers." The grim note returned to Jeff's voice as he concluded: "Listen, lady, you make up your mind quickly about whose back yard you want to play in or I'll have to do something about you. I wouldn't like that!"

As he hung up the receiver, Jeff turned to the girl and said: "Look, Betty, I'm sorry to interrupt you. But this party is getting rough. What were you coming here to tell me?"

"The name's Gwen, Gwen Oliver," she said, "and I wish I'd never seen you or the big tips you toss around. It's like catching a stick of dynamite with a gold handle."

"Yes, yes," Jeff said impatiently. "But you came here to tell me something. What was it?"

"First off," she said, "right after you dictated that Rossi letter the other night—"

"The one in which I mentioned speculation over investment," he put in, "and mentioned a specific amount of money?"

"That's the one," the girl said. "Well, right after you finished that letter a voice behind me commanded me to leave it right where it was. It was a man and he said he was reading it. I knew he had a gun. I could feel it graze my neck. After a time he said not to move, to tell no one of his visit and to mail the letter."

"Then what happened?"

"Quite a while went by, I guess, before I was convinced he was gone," she said. "I guess I didn't breathe freely until another guest came along with some work."

"Who was the guest?"

"A Miss Ray," she said matter-of-factly.

"Miss Ray!" said Jeff. "That's important. What did she say? Did she seem to be interested in your nervous condition? Did you get the impression she knew me? Did you think maybe she wanted to see if you'd talk about your experience?"

"I don't know," the girl replied. "I couldn't swear positively to anything. Though I think she did mention you, because we could see you over the balcony down in the lobby and she said she'd noticed you around. Though that might have been simply the interest of any girl in a good-looking man!"

"Save the compliments, my dear," Jeff said. "Could you work yourself into believing now that she might have had more than an academic Juliet motive in knowing something about me? Do you think, for example, she might have been interesting in calling your attention to me to see whether you'd recount your strange experience with the voice with the gun? Just to see if you'd talk."

"It could have been one thing or the other," the girl said.

"Tell me," said Jeff, "weren't you at all tempted to tell her about the man with the gun?"

"I was," she said, "and I was going to. Then I changed my mind."

"Why?" asked Jeff. "I'll tell you. You thought, instinctively, that you couldn't trust a feminine guest."

"I guess that's right," said the girl.

"That's all right, Gwen," said Jeff. "There's the missing factor!"

"I don't know what it is," she said, "but I'm frightened!"

"Of course you are," said Jeff. "I'm sorry about this. And thanks for coming here to tell me about all this. You don't know how important it is to me. In the face of that threat you showed a lot of courage." He took several bills from his pocket and pressed them into her hand. "Look," he said. "Here's some money; you run along and see a doctor right away. Tell him you fell downstairs or something. Then take a vacation. Say you're sick or something like that and go away for a couple of weeks. Estes Park, maybe. Or Los Angeles if you are really anxious to get away from it all. What do you say?"

She didn't need to reply. When she had gone, Jeff sat up in bed jotting down his conclusions. This was a nice game. It was going to be nicer. He instinctively felt that another day or two would find him full of fight. He didn't like people who used guns and clicked their heels, spoke casually of murder and smashed women in the face with brass knuckles. Unpleasant people to deal with. Dangerous!

But swindling swindlers! That was one of the most entertaining methods of turning a dishonest penny into an honest dollar. He propped a chair under the knob of his door and went to sleep. It never occurred to him to call the porter for a reservation on the night plane to the West. It never occurred to him to mind his own business! Thomas Jefferson Gorman was that kind of person.

CHAPTER VII.

CASH OFFERED OUT.

JEFF gave lusty voice to song in the shower the next morning and then considered the situation anew as he toweled himself off.

"Nothing ventured, nothing gained," he finally told himself in the shaving mirror and forthwith went to the telephone, calling George Ray's room.

Roberta answered and at the sound of her voice he felt a vague qualm at having entertained such dire suspicions with regard to her character.

"How's for having breakfast?" he invited, adding: "George, too, of course."

"I'm . . . I'm sorry," she said. "Some other time, but I would like to speak with you just a minute. Can you meet me some place where we can't be seen—that little writing room off the lobby?" She sounded nervous and upset.

"Anything the matter?" Jeff asked sharply, cursing himself for not having thought of the Rays after the incident involving Gwen Oliver. If Steele knew who he was, he also knew by now who the real Rays were. "Those fellows pay a visit to you last night after I left?"

"No . . . no, nothing like that. I just want to see you," she said. "Don't ask me any more questions over the telephone."

"O. K.," Jeff said. "Be right down."

He scratched his head and frowned, but this did no appreciable good so he went on with his dressing and then proceeded with the first step of his plan, which involved a cigarette case he had accepted from the pocket of a Japanese gentleman who had no more need for such items, being thoroughly dead.

The plan wasn't much as plans went. Really nothing more than the release of a few trial balloons in an effort to find out where everyone stood, himself included. It did, however, involve the use of his check book, which he put in his pocket with deep respect, and the cigarette case. The latter was peculiar for two reasons. Jeff didn't smoke, having a conviction that smoking increased fatigue and fatigue slowed up the free flow of ideas. Jeff never knew when he was going to have need of an idea. He wasn't sure that his theory on this matter was correct, but even the cigarette advertisements stated that a good smoke relaxed one. Jeff didn't like to relax unless he was in bed. Unpleasant surprises had a way of popping up in moments of relaxation.

The second unusual factor about the cigarette case was its appearance. It looked like a miniature camera. There was a good reason for this. It was a camera. Jeff loaded it with both film and four cigarettes, its capacity.

He pocketed the cigarette-case camera and made another telephone call before setting out, this time to Nada's room.

Her voice did not sound cheerful.

"Is everybody unhappy this morning?" Jeff asked.

"Don't call me any more," she said. "And I warn you, don't attempt to see me. It would be dangerous—for you. And if you don't care about yourself, think of me."

"Come, come," Jeff said. "Don't be so dramatic. I just wanted to ask you to have breakfast with me."

"No," she said. "Don't you understand English, you fool? I'm under suspicion now and your life isn't worth a nickel."

"The devil you say," Jeff remarked. "I'd take exception to the extremely low valuation you place upon my existence —I really don't think you realize my true worth—but I'm worried about something more important. Tell me, do I have halitosis? Nobody wants to have breakfast with me."

"I'm not clowning!" she exclaimed, exasperation in her throaty voice. "Really, I like you—please clear out before you get hurt. I . . . I might even be forced to take measures against you myself. And if I had to in order to save my own skin, I would. You know that."

"You haven't forgotten a small matter of five thousand dollars, have you?"

"Thanks, I'm not having any," she said. "Good-by, Jeff."

Jeff put down the receiver thoughtfully and then picked it up again. He was reckless only in a well-calculated way and there was nothing he valued so much as his own skin. "Send a bellboy up here, please," he asked. "Tell him to bring me the morning paper."

The bellboy arrived on the wings of the wind, already considering what horse he would play with the rewards of his efforts on Mr. Gorman's behalf, even as he knocked on the door.

Jeff took the paper, rewarded the bellboy with a dollar, and then astonished the boy no end by dropping the paper on the bed after a casual glance at the headlines, saying: "I'll just go to the elevator with you. There are some mornings when there is nothing I love so much as company when I'm on the way to breakfast."

As he locked his door, the door across the hall opened cautiously. A head appeared and disappeared and the door started to close equally cautiously. Jeff lunged against it with his shoulders and it flew open with a thud. A man cursed and Jeff looked into the room. On the floor sprawled the chauffeur of last evening's automobile ride. He was reaching for an automatic on the carpet beside him.

"Pardon me," said Jeff, his tone dripping with solicitude. "So clumsy of me. Tripped over my shadow."

He closed the door quickly before the astonished bellhop had an opportunity to look into the room. Jeff slipped another silver dollar into the boy's hand and said: "Wait here just a minute, will you? The gentleman in there may come popping out any moment to find out what time it is or something. He's always asking me the time, but I haven't time myself to give it to him this morning."

The lucky elevator boy was George this morning, and after the customary bet and nonstop flight to the ground floor, Jeff remarked: "George, if you hear any rumors that I'm potty, don't believe a word of it. I'm just a man of moods."

"At two bucks a mood, you can shoot chambermaids for all I care, Mr. Gorman," said George.

In the lobby a large Teutonic-looking man, sitting in a position where he commanded a view of the elevators, arose when Jeff appeared and strolled after him. Jeff wasn't sure, due to the bad light which had prevailed at Steele's house, but he thought the man looked like one of Steele's guards. He hummed a bar of "Drink To Me Only With Thine Eyes" and turned suddenly in his tracks, facing the man.

"I beg your pardon," he remarked politely. "Have you seen The Shadow?"

The man's mouth opened in bewilderment. "What?"

"I just wondered," Jeff said. "I heard the hotel was full of G-men looking for bond thieves and instantly I said to myself, 'Ah, The Shadow.' "

The man looked around him uncertainly and then walked off wordlessly, a dazed expression on his face.

Jeff contentedly watched the man wander off. "I wonder why somebody doesn't turn a blitzkrieg back on the Germans," he mused to himself. "They're so naïve at times. Or have I convinced some innocent citizen that perfectly normal-looking people are going off the hatch right and left?"

Convinced, at least, that he was no longer observed, Jeff slipped into the writing room. Roberta Ray was already there, pacing nervously up and down. Otherwise the room was deserted.

She hurried to him. "Thanks for coming," she said. "I . . . I want to beg a favor of you."

Jeff took both her hands in his and grinned. "Hey, chin up, young lady. It can't be as serious as all that."

"Oh, yes, but it is," she said. She seemed on the verge of tears. "You want to help me, don't you?"

"You bet I do," Jeff said, unqualified commitment in his tone as well as his words. Almost instantly he regretted having stuck out his neck to the collar bone. The threat of tears had temporarily confused him. In addition, Roberta Ray was even better looking in daylight than in mazda light. Having exposed his Adam's apple to the guillotine, however, he manfully left it there. "What's the program?"

"You must forget all about what we told you last night," she said. "Forget us, too. And leave here. You can't help us. We have to work this out ourselves. Steele knows who you are and what you know, and he is ruthless."

"Well, *well,*" said Jeff, startled. Nothing seemed to add up. "You, too? I guess I should have a talk with Dale Carnegie about winning friends and influencing people. Nobody likes me."

"Oh, but I do like you," said Roberta Ray. "That's one reason why I want you to go." She smiled a little bit. "We'll meet again in better days. I've got a feeling—"

"That's better," Jeff said, tucking her arm under his. "Come on over here by the window a minute. I want to get a good look at you before we part."

"Then you will go?" she asked eagerly.

"Of course not," Jeff replied. "But I may not see you for a couple of hours."

"Please be serious," she said. "Our identity is known, and if you stay here, it will just make it more dangerous for all of us. And Steele wouldn't hesitate to kill you."

Jeff took out his cigarette-case camera and leveled it at her. Her reaction was so violent he forgot to trip the shutter. Throwing her hand in front of her face, she stepped back from the window light, crying: "Oh! What are you doing?" There was no mistaking the fear in her voice.

Jeff pressed the button and a cigarette popped up from the side of the camera.

"Just offering you a cigarette," he said casually, but his eyes were no longer friendly. "A trick cigarette case I picked up in San Francisco. Clever, isn't it?"

He extended it to her and she took the cigarette. Her hand was trembling. "What's the matter?" he asked. "Afraid of cameras?"

"No . . . no, I'm just so nervous, overwrought," she said, her voice filled with relief. "I didn't know what it was. It looked like a . . . gun there for a minute." She examined the case curiously. "It is cute, isn't it?"

"Something new," Jeff replied. As she stepped back into the light he once more pressed the button. He had wasted one film, but the second, he knew, was good. Diplomatically, he placed the cigarette, which had popped up at the same time he took the picture, into his mouth and extended a light to Bobbie.

"Now, what's this all about?" he asked, lighting his cigarette from the lighter on the side of the camera and fighting down a feeling that he was going to choke to death. Being unaccustomed to it, smoking was bad enough, but smoking before he had even had so much as a cup of coffee was twice as bad. "Why this sudden change of heart?"

"I can't tell you," she said. "But you must believe me. It's for the good of all of us."

Jeff looked at her skeptically, saying nothing and making no move to go.

"Everything has changed since we saw you last night," she said. "Steele called us. He knows where we are and who you are." Jeff shrugged his shoulders and she added: "We've worked out a solution to our own problem, too."

"Somebody offer to kick through with the dough you need?" Jeff inquired, watching her closely.

"Yes," she said. "That's it; so, you see, we really don't need your help."

Jeff didn't believe her.

"That's too bad," he remarked. "I was going to take that stock off your hands myself."

"Oh!" she gasped. "All of it?"

He nodded. "Why don't you get your brother and let's talk this over? I'm kind of worried about you. I'd like to be around and see that Steele and his thugs don't pull any tricks on you."

"That's sweet of you," she said. And she said it as if she meant it. "I hardly know what to say."

"Well, let George say it," he grinned. "Where is he?"

"In the dining room," she answered. She hesitated uncertainly.

"Have you got this money or has it just been promised to you?" Jeff asked.

"Well, it's just been promised," she replied. "The man can't give it to us right away—maybe not for a week. He has to convert some bonds or something. I don't know exactly what."

Jeff took her by the arm and propelled her toward the dining room. "Let's talk to George," he said. "It'll take *me* just three hours to get that money for you, and time is important. Also, I won't hedge or change my mind at the last minute. I want to see you get a break. Also, this proposition looks like a money maker to me, and I like to make money. And don't forget, I can be that third party that will take care of Mr. Steele for you while George makes himself scarce for a while."

Crossing the lobby, Jeff saw Jimmy Ranger, the house detective, coming toward him. The freckled face of the law was a study in several emotions as he saw Jeff in the company of Miss Ray at this early hour after having so recently left him with his fiancée, Nada Gerling.

"You run along into the dining room," Jeff said hurriedly to Roberta. "I'll be right along. Have to talk to a man about a legal matter. Won't be a minute."

She seemed rather relieved.

"Morning, Mr. Gorman," Jimmy Ranger said. He looked after Bobbie Ray. "You engaged to her, too."

"No; one engagement at a time," Jeff said. "How did you make out with our friend?"

"He had a record as long as your arm," the tow-headed youth replied.

"Name was Melther, a New York thug. Wanted for bank robbery, among other things. You must be lucky for me; I'm five hundred dollars richer today."

"Huh?" Jeff said.

"Yeah; this guy shot a night watchman in a warehouse robbery and there was a price on his head," Ranger said. "I'll cut it up with you when I get it."

"No; you keep it," Jeff laughed. "Was there anything in the papers?"

Ranger nodded. "It was in the news, but you weren't mentioned, and it just said the arrest took place in 'a hotel.' He's being held incommunicado, too. You don't have to worry about him getting out."

"Swell work," Jeff complimented him. "Maybe I'll have some more business for you."

"Say, listen," Ranger said, his voice a bit curious, "what's going on around here, anyway?"

"I wish I knew," Jeff replied. He started for the dining room. "Personally, I think your hotel's a nest of intrigue."

Going into the dining room, he met Roberta coming out. "George is over there." She smiled, waving toward a far corner. "Go on over. I forgot to see if I had any mail. Be right back."

JEFF made his way across the dining room with his gray matter working overtime. People surrounded by tense situations that may be altered at any moment don't generally forget to see about their mail. It would almost appear that Miss Ray was going to make a phone call. Instructions, possibly?

He considered following her, but George Ray was watching him and he was afraid to tip his hand.

Ray's attitude was quite different from his sullen bearing of the previous evening. He was cordiality itself, but Jeff wondered what his reception would have been had Roberta not had the opportunity of telling him about their conversation in the writing room.

"We deeply appreciate your offer of assistance, Mr. Gorman," Ray told him. He added a few more bouquets.

"Not at all," said Jeff. "Don't mention it. Consider it my patriotic duty under the circumstances. Looks like a good, sound business venture, too."

"There's no doubt about that," Ray declared. "However, notwithstanding, I'm afraid we must decline your kind aid." He leaned across the table and lowered his voice. "Unfortunately, as you know, you have been placed in a very dangerous situation, and both Roberta and myself feel that if anything were to happen to you, we would be responsible for it."

"That's interesting," Jeff remarked. "Why?"

Ray started and looked at him suspiciously. "Why, naturally, because if it were not that your identity and my own were confused, you wouldn't have become involved."

"Oh, that," said Jeff. "Well, I'm ready to bankroll you, anyway. Quite frankly, in addition to the profit I foresee, I would like to be around to sort of stand by your sister in case of any difficulties."

"That's one reason why I'm so anxious to have you disassociate yourself from this affair entirely," Ray said. He permitted a worried note to creep into his voice. "Herr Steele would be most suspicious of any alliance between us under the circumstances, and I'm afraid for my sister's safety."

"Oh, I wouldn't worry too much about Steele," Jeff said, injecting a note of phony bravado into his tone and manner. "Not now, anyway."

"What do you mean?" Ray demanded sharply. " 'Not now.' "

"Well, anybody who'd make a mistake like he made last night in mixing up a person as important as you are to him must be kind of stupid," Jeff said. "You know how these squareheads are. Of course, I sympathize with your feelings about your sister, but don't worry about it. I can protect her."

"Indeed?" said Ray, rather dryly. "How nice!"

"Well, that's the kind of man I am," Jeff said. "Always there with the helping hand. Never let my success go to my head. And I don't mind telling you, Ray, I like your sister a lot. Mighty fine girl."

"Thanks," Ray said.

Jeff devoted himself to his fruit juice, but not so intently that he did not see a slight smile, which seemed a bit contemptuous, curl the corners of Ray's mouth. He was happily aware of the fact that Mr. George Ray was altering his opinion of Mr. Thomas Jefferson Gorman. He could practically see Mr. Ray's gray matter going through the process of deciding that first opinions were definitely very, very liable to be misleading and that Mr. Thomas Jefferson Gorman was really somewhat on the dumb side, in addition to being exceptionally vain and inclined toward loud-mouthiness. Probably, Mr. Ray was thinking, one of those people who blunder into things and come out on top by sheer luck.

"Here comes Roberta," Ray said, rising. Instead of getting up immediately, Jeff twisted in his chair to look and saw her give George an intent look and an almost imperceptible nod.

"No mail?" Jeff asked, jumping up with too-elaborate ceremony and pulling back her chair.

"No; no mail," she said.

"You give me a little help with this brother of yours, Bobbie," Jeff said somewhat pompously. "He seems to think I'm a daisy or something. If anybody can swing this for you, I can."

Roberta looked at him uncertainly. Jeff saw that she sensed the change in his attitude and was puzzled about it, possibly alarmed. She was much quicker on the trigger than her brother. At a quick glance from George, however, she leaned over and put her hand on Jeff's, saying: "I know you could. I have implicit confidence in you."

"Atta girl," Jeff said. He looked at Ray. "Well, what do you say, George? This other fellow may get cold feet or have trouble raising the money in time to help you. I'll give you my check right now for twenty-five thousand dollars. That'll be for a seven-day option on the stock. But I'll probably take the rest of it up in three days at the most."

"Well, that does sound attractive," Ray said. "A bird in the hand, you know. And Roberta's a much better judge of people than I am. When she has faith in a person, you can rely on them being the best." He laughed. "She's my divining rod. I only went against her judgment once, and that was damn near fatal. She told me Mitchell was no good." Ray took out his cigarettes, adding: "Of course, it may be dangerous, but I guess we can protect Roberta, and if you're willing to take the risk, I don't know why we shouldn't. And then, you've been so white about this, I'd like to see you make some money."

"Now you're talking," Jeff said heartily. "Here, have one of my cigarettes." He produced his camera-case and held it out to Ray, pressing the button. Ray looked momentarily startled, but there was no alarm in his manner. He accepted the cigarette with a laugh.

"Quite a gadget," he said. "Let me see it."

"I'll get you one if you like it," Jeff said. He slipped the case back into his pocket. "Do you accept my offer."

"Why an option?" Ray asked. "It's perfectly all right, of course, but I just don't quite understand."

"Well, I never buy anything sight unseen," Jeff said. "After all, those certificates are in San Francisco. They'll be a couple of days getting here and I want to take a run down and see the property." He cleared his throat. "Always do business that way. Cautious. That's the way I've made my fortune."

Ray and Bobbie exchanged glances. "Be too dangerous," Ray said. "Mitchell's guard would never let you in the field, and if you tried to get in without permission your life wouldn't be worth a plugged nickel."

Jeff frowned doubtfully. "Well, I don't know—" he said. "Of course, I don't know anything about helium, but I'd like to see the place. I have a few ideas about interesting some British businessmen I know in the place." He rubbed his fingers together to indicate greasing the palm. "Want to have a quick outlet ready when we get rid of Steele. Couldn't you tell them I was a State tax inspector or something?"

Jeff saw that Bobbie Ray was getting nervous. His newly acquired pomposity and apparent gullibility had her worried, but George was taking it in. "Yes, I guess that could be done," he said. "When do you want to go down?"

"In a day or two," Jeff said. He took out his check book. "I'll give you a check now on the Banca California. Just scribble me out a memorandum agreement on the option and you can have your own attorney draw up a formal paper later on."

"Huh?" said George Ray. "Oh, yes—fine. You don't lose any time, do you?"

"When I make up my mind, I move like lightning," Jeff said. "Never let it be said that Jeff Gorman let an opportunity slip through his fingers."

Jeff paused with his pen poised over his check book. "Would you rather have five thousand dollars of this in cash?" he asked.

Ray's surprise amused him and then he noted a greedy look in the man's eyes. "Why, yes—that might be a good idea. I'm rather low myself and my funds aren't in a Denver bank. In this dangerous position we're in, can't tell when we might need some cash." He looked at Jeff curiously. "You don't mean to tell me that you always have so much cash on hand?"

Jeff laughed and put an extra dash of boisterousness in it. With a theatrical gesture, he reached in his pocket and withdrew a heavy wad of folded currency from which he peeled five one-thousand-dollar bills. "Never know when you need it," he said. "That's why they call me Cash Gorman."

Jeff returned his attention to his check, but out of the corners of his eyes he observed George Ray as the man reached for the money. His expression was almost a smirk. He could always be mistaken, of course, but Jeff decided that if ever a man's expression said, "Boy, what a sucker this guy is!" that man was George Ray.

Jeff lifted his glance quickly to Bobbie Ray's face. She was staring at him intently with narrowed eyes. Possibly it was his imagination, but she didn't seem quite the honest, clear-eyed, courageous and open-hearted girl of the previous evening. Jeff sighed as he signed the check. People were always living up to his worst expectations.

Suddenly he grinned with delight as a possible explanation occurred to him. Maybe she thought *he* was a crook.

CHAPTER VIII.

JEFF DROPS PRETENSE.

JEFF started downtown, his destination the Merchants & Drovers Bank. En route he stopped off at a photographic supply shop. He put a ten-dollar bill on the counter and extracted the film from his camera.

"That is your fee," he told the shop manager. "There are three exposures on this roll. I want you to develop them and give me four-by-five prints. I'm en route to the Merchants & Drovers Bank." He consulted an envelope from his pocket. "I'll be in the office of Mr. R. E. Mason. How soon can you get wet prints to me?"

The photo man looked at the ten-dollar bill and smiled. "They may be there when you arrive."

ON being announced, Jeff was shown immediately into the office of Mason, a vice president of the bank.

Mason's greeting was cordial. "I've been expecting you," he said. "Mart Rossi wrote me that you'd probably be in to see us."

"Yes, I have a note of introduction from him," Jeff said, extending the envelope. "He said he wanted to warn you about me."

Mason laughed and read the note: "Have you been looking into this real-estate proposition?"

Jeff nodded. "I would have been in to see you, but immediately I investigated it I saw it wasn't for me. I'm afraid I lean more toward speculation."

"I see Rossi says he's afraid of the same thing," Mason smiled. "I highly approve of speculation myself, to reasonable limits, of course. Makes the wheels of industry turn."

"You ought to tell Mart that," Jeff said. "He thinks anything except government bonds is on the risky side and he was worrying about them the last time I saw him."

"Have you found a speculation to turn his blood cold?" Mason inquired.

"Absolutely," said Jeff. "It even turns my blood cold."

Mason laughed again and Jeff decided this was going to be a very pleasant business relationship.

"Can I be of any service to you in this fearful business?" the banker asked.

Jeff nodded. "First, I want to arrange the transfer of one hundred thousand dollars from the Banca California to an account here, as quickly as possible."

Mason consulted his watch. He summoned his secretary. "A draft on the Banca California. Mr. Thomas Jefferson Gorman. One hundred thousand dollars." To Jeff he said: "If we get right to it, there's a plane leaving at 12:15 which we can catch."

This attended to, Jeff asked: "Do you know George Ray of Oklahoma City?"

Mason nodded. "I know of him. You mean old Herman Ray's son?"

"That's him," Jeff affirmed. "I'm interested in an oil company of which he is the president. Pueblo State Oil. Do you know anything about it?"

Mason shook his head and spoke into the interoffice telephone: "Ask Mr. Brown to step into my office as soon as possible, please." To Jeff he said with a shake of his head: "What I've heard of George Ray hasn't been too favorable. Ran through all his inheritance, I understand. Got badly in debt. He was let out by one of his father's former associates in an Oklahoma oil company, and there were rumors that he would have gone to jail if his sister hadn't come to his rescue."

"So?" said Jeff. "I wasn't informed of that." He hesitated a moment, marshaling his thoughts. "I can't tell you too much about this, excepting that you may rest assured that in everything which I do I take pains to maintain myself in a position which is legally . . . ah . . . intact. The whole affair is rather fantastic, and when I can I'll tell you about it. Meanwhile, the picture is rife with larceny, and I don't know whether young Ray is the victim of it or a party to it. Or both. However, there may be a possibility of turning an honest dollar."

Mason laughed. "Keep your nose clean," he said with a great lack of institutional decorum. "Tell me more."

"I'm afraid I've already told you too much," Jeff said.

"Don't worry about it," Mason said. "I don't talk in my sleep." Another man entered the office and Jeff was introduced to Mr. Brown.

"He's an expert on such matters," said Mason. "Mr. Gorman wants to know something about Pueblo State Oil, Charlie."

Mr. Brown looked at Jeff with mournful interest. "I take it for granted that you don't want to tell me why you're interested," he said. He seemed rather wistful.

"As a matter of fact,. I don't," Jeff said. "What made you ask?"

Mr. Brown hesitated doubtfully. Mason leaned forward, keenly interested. "It's all right, Charlie. I have an idea it might be a good thing to fill Mr. Gorman with any sidelights on the situation which you are familiar with, so long as you are not violating the confidence of any clients."

Brown shook his head. "No violation of confidence. It's just that Pueblo State never has been a big company and it's always been something of a turkey. But four times in the last three months I've had requests for information, and in each case the man who made the request acted in a most mysterious manner. Had I not known them, I would have thought they were looking over the bank with intent to rob. 'Furtive' is the word."

Jeff laughed joyously. "Mr. Brown, I regret that I can't tell you in detail just how much you have helped me. That's the answer to one of the most important questions in my mind. At least, I think it is."

Mason nodded. "I think I follow you. Can I tell Brown about it later? We might be able to be of some help."

"By all means," Jeff said. "And thanks. Now, about the company itself?"

Brown briefly sketched the position of the company, which was roughly that given him by the Rays, except that old man Ray's holdings were larger than he had been led to believe.

"You think the Rays inherited outright control?" Jeff asked.

Brown nodded. "I'm sure of it. Of course, he may have sold some stock in this recent activity which followed the gradual purchase of considerable holdings by Eastern interests. There's been activity in that company which I'm not familiar with, but I do feel that most of the stockholders were probably glad to sell when the opportunity presented itself. All these transactions have been private, of course. The company's just been slogging along. Until lately nobody had any interest in it except its creditors, and they were hardly hopeful."

"Thanks a lot," Jeff said. "By the way, could you obtain a list of stockholders of record during the last two preceding quarters?"

Brown smiled dourly. "Just out of curiosity I have already set the wheels in motion. I'll let you know what turns up."

Mason's secretary interrupted them, holding Jeff's wet prints from the photo shop distastefully at arm's length.

"For Mr. Gorman," she said.

"Thanks." Jeff laughed, relieving her of her damp and chemically odorous burden. He placed the pictures on a newspaper and asked if either Brown or Mason could identify them. Both shook their heads.

"Do you know George Ray, Mr. Brown?" Jeff asked.

"No. Sorry; never met him," Brown said. He didn't sound sorry.

"Well, that's him," Jeff said. "At least, that's supposed to be him. And that's his sister, Roberta."

"They don't look much like the old man," Brown remarked. "I knew him well."

"So?" said Jeff. "Well, the pictures are pretty foggy, but anyone who knew them could recognize them, I feel sure."

They agreed without hesitation to that. "Don't tell me," Mason laughed, "you want to put us in the private-detective business."

"You're right abreast of me," Jeff said. "Will you send them to one of the Oklahoma City banks and ask what gives?"

"Why not?" Mason asked. "Last year I was in the circus business. No service is too large or too small to keep our clients happy. I understand Charlie, here, is taking up knitting so he can discuss the problem intelligently with some of our fair clients."

Mr. Brown looked very sad. "We used to have some dignity in this business," he said.

JEFF was in an exultant mood. Everything added up. He was dealing with swindlers—master confidence men. Steele and Ray were associated. There was only one flaw: Roberta Ray. He couldn't convince himself that she was a crook. It didn't seem right. But maybe he was getting soft. Or did she believe her brother's story? She might actually think that Steele was a Nazi.

Whatever that situation, Steele must have decided he was too hot to handle. Steele was a dangerous article. Generally speaking, confidence men didn't go in for murder, but he had no doubt that Steele would if necessary. Otherwise, Nada would have sold him out in a second. She was afraid.

He laughed aloud as he made his way along Champa Street. He must have given them a nasty turn when he ceased denying his own identity on reaching Steele's house and pretended to be Ray. However, Steele had played up to him nobly, but that move had doubtless thrown their regular approach on the victim out of gear. It had been a nice act all around, his included.

The plot certainly had some beautiful features. The securities sold might even be genuine, but they were sold at prices way above their real value. And those hooked couldn't very well go to the police without revealing the fact that they had been aware of Nazi activities without informing the authorities. Possibly the regular approach tied them up even more completely.

Things were progressing nicely now, however. He was convinced he had sold George Ray a bill of goods that morning. They wouldn't be content with twenty-five thousand dollars when there was a chance of getting one hundred and ten thousand dollars more. The thing to do now was to locate someone who had been hooked and see how he could sharpen up an angle.

Deep in thought, he stepped from the curb at the corner of Sixteenth Street. A woman shrieked. A police whistle shrilled. Brakes ground and Jeff looked up, startled. Almost on top of him was a heavy car, which had crashed through a red light and was hurtling toward him, out of control. Jeff threw himself back toward the sidewalk. The edge of a fender caught him and flipped him through the air. The car climbed the curb and smashed into a telephone pole.

Jeff attempted to climb to his feet, fell to his knees. A spectator grasped his arm to help him. A huge crowd formed. A patrolman pushed his way through and took Jeff's other arm. "Looks like you've got a broken leg," he said. "Better wait here until the ambulance comes."

Jeff shook his head groggily, trying to recall something about the car. Suddenly his mind cleared. He had a mental picture of the driver. The man was the chauffeur of Steele's car. The same one who had been watching his activities that morning from the hotel room across the corridor from his own.

A traffic officer pushed through the crowd. "You get the driver of that car?" he shouted to the patrolman at Jeff's side.

"No. Isn't he in the car?"

The other man shook his head and disappeared. An ambulance siren screamed. Jeff looked down at his leg in disgust. It was covered with blood. One trousers leg was almost completely torn away. There was a long gash in his thigh. Gingerly, he tested his weight on the leg.

"It's not broken," he told the cop. "Just a cut."

"The ambulance surgeon confirmed this. "Better let me get you over to the hospital," he said after cleaning the wound and bandaging it.

"Is it deep?" Jeff asked. "Need stitches?"

"No, but there may be something else the matter with you," the interne told him.

"Skip it," Jeff said. "I'll have the hotel doctor look it over later. I'm O. K. otherwise. Let me get into this store here and buy myself a pair of pants."

The cop accompanied him, taking down Jeff's name and what information he could give about the accident. Jeff didn't mention Steele's chauffeur. A second officer came in. "Looks like you're out of luck, buddy, unless you carry personal accident insurance. That was a stolen car."

The pants situation under control, Jeff tried walking again. "If you can, you'd better walk a few blocks before you get a cab," one of the officers told him. "Otherwise you'll be stiff as hell."

Jeff took his advice, but had gone only a half block when he was startled to hear a female voice at his side say: "Remember me, Mr. Gorman?"

It was Nada. Accompanying her was the big, Teutonic-looking man whom he had seen in the lobby that morning. He hadn't been wrong; the man was one of Steele's bodyguards.

"Hello, darling," Jeff said. "Did you arrange that little accident for me?"

She looked nervously at the man beside her and said: "I don't know what you are talking about, but I'd like to ask you a question. What kind of business were you engaged in in Shanghai?"

"That," said Jeff, "is none of your business."

"From the papers in your room we have reason to believe that you were engaged in questionable operations," she said.

"Nothing is questionable in Shanghai these days," Jeff declared. "But as long as we're on the subject, your own activitites are not exactly above question."

"We won't argue the point, Mr. Gorman, but something could very easily happen to you and, if those papers were found near the body, it would be assumed that the reason lay in them," Nada said. "Mr. Steele has this message for you: 'Deal yourself out—keep your mouth shut and don't see the Rays any more. We feel you are a reasonable man. It might embarrass us to have to shoot you.'"

"Imagine *my* embarrassment," Jeff said.

"I'm a very good shot, Mr. Gorman," the big man said, speaking for the first time.

"My, my, how sinister! You haven't been going to the movies too much, have you?" Jeff asked.

Nada smiled. "The movies sometimes offer excellent suggestions as to premeditated suicide. Good-by. And I hope we won't meet again."

"Tch-tch, I must be losing my sex appeal," Jeff said. "Well, good-by. Sorry I couldn't keep you company last night. It might have been a nice romance."

They turned away and Jeff called after them: "Oh, by the way, Nada, I've something to ask you."

She stepped back toward him, momentarily out of her companion's earshot.

"Is Steele still playing Nazi agent?" Jeff asked.

"Shut up, you fool," she said in quick alarm. "If he knew you were wise he'd kill you in an instant."

"He just tried to," Jeff said. "That offer still goes."

The big man stepped back toward them.

"I'll call you," she murmured. Aloud she added: "That auto wreck was just to scare you. He came a little too close, but you know now that we mean business. This is your last warning."

"Yours, too," Jeff said. He could almost see that sinking in as she turned away again. Mr. Steele would lose in a toss-up between himself and a possibility of exposure and jail when Nada began thinking it over.

CHAPTER IX.

STRANGE SUCKERS.

THESE were important moments, what with strange automobiles trying to tie into him and Nada making odd cracks about life and death. But Cash Gorman liked to play his cards, in such situations, very close to his vest, from which point none could glance over his shoulder for a peep.

The opposition at that moment revealed what Cash suspected to be a hole card of some indefinable proportions. He was hobbling along the street back to the Golden Fleece Hotel for a conversation with Jimmy Ranger when he noticed George Ray emerge from a building on the opposite side of the street. With him was a man unmistakably marked. He was a Wall Streeter; he had that cut about his clothes. His bearing spelled Southampton or Chestnut Hills.

The two stepped into a cab which took off in the direction from which he had come. Jeff leaped into a hack and commanded the driver, persuaded by a bill, to follow. In direct violation of all police signs, the driver made a U turn.

"Life is getting more like the movies every day," the driver commented. "What are you, a G-man, a reporter, somebody's fifth column or a British agent?"

"I'm Mrs. O'Leary's cow," Jeff grinned. "I'm just warming up to kick over the lantern."

The driver earned his five dollars and Jeff found himself back at the Golden Fleece Hotel. He reached the lobby just as Ray and his companion arrived at the elevators.

"Hello, George," he shouted across the floor, startling an elderly lobby sitter, who was in the midst of a noon-time siesta, very nearly out of his shoes. Ray looked around and Jeff waved, but Ray pretended that he had not seen him and hustled his companion into the elevator.

Jeff's sore leg prevented him from reaching the elevator before it started upstairs, but he stepped into the next waiting car and was instantly whisked to Ray's floor.

Roberta answered his knock. "Who's there?" she asked through the door.

"It's Jeff, Miss Ray," he said. "Jeff Gorman."

She opened the door, looking as fresh and beautiful as a morning-glory, and welcomed him with a smile of genuine friendliness. "It's nice to see you," she said. "I'm being a little careful about doors and things."

"Don't blame you," Jeff said, overcome once more with an alarming feeling that this girl just couldn't be a crook. "Your brother home?"

She shook her head. "Won't you come in?"

Jeff did, looking around in some amazement. The door to the adjoining room was open, and neither Ray nor his visitor was present. He cursed himself for his stupidity. He should have waited for the elevator which Ray had taken to return and made sure to which floor Ray had gone. Apparently his companion had a room in the hotel also.

"Expecting company?" he asked Roberta.

She shook her head again, but he thought she looked at him rather sharply. "No. What makes you ask?"

"Oh, you're all prettied up!" Jeff replied. "As a matter of fact, you look more beautiful every time I see you."

She laughed, favoring Jeff with a long interested look. "I'll bet you tell that to all the girls," she said, "but I like it, anyway."

"There are no other girls," Jeff said. "I forgot them all last night at twelve o'clock. Twelve ten, to be exact."

"And what happened at exactly twelve ten?" she inquired.

"Have you forgotten so soon?" Jeff asked sadly. "I called upon Mr. George Ray and his sister, Roberta."

Jeff could have kept this up all afternoon and enjoyed it greatly, but his curiosity concerning Ray and his companion compelled him to break off.

"You shouldn't be alone like this," he said, on leaving. "As a matter of fact, I'd feel much better if you'd go to another hotel and register under another name for the time being. I'm worried about you; that fellow Steele is bad business."

"Oh, I'll be perfectly safe until those stock certificates get here from San Francisco," she said, smiling at him warmly. "And then, of course, we'll be able to pay Mitchell the money he advanced us to buy them for Steele, thanks to you. It will be a relief, then, to leave while you ease Steele and Mitchell out of the company, but I do hope you are sure of what you are doing. I'd . . . I'd feel terrible if anything happened to you."

"I'll be O. K.," Jeff said. "I'm going to clear out, too, personally. Once I get hold of that stock I'm buying from you and the proxy to vote your stock, I'll do the rest through my attorneys. Eminently respectable gentlemen, too. Have them call the board meeting and ease out Steele & Co. gracefully." He opened the door. "By the way, has George written that letter to Mitchell to pave the way for my inspection of the field?"

She hesitated and then nodded. "Yes, right after breakfast. He telephoned."

"Good. See you later," Jeff said. "How about dinner at seven?"

"Thanks. I'll have to see what George is doing," she said. She halted him as he started to leave, saying, "Jeff—" There was a little worried frown on her face.

"What?"

She put her hand on his arm, and for a moment it appeared as if she were going to confide something in him. Then her expression changed. "I just wanted to tell you again how much I appreciate what you are doing for us."

"Skip it," Jeff grinned. "Anything I could do for you would be a pleasure."

That, he decided, was only a white lie. Why was it he was always being attracted to people with larceny in their hearts? Not, of course, that he was without a small personal vein of larceny, but at least he kept his on a legal basis.

"Do you mean that?" she asked.

"Absolutely." He patted the hand resting on his arm and she smiled a little. "It's the uncle in me," Jeff explained.

"If you really mean what you say, do something for me," she said with intense seriousness. "Get out of this—completely. Leave Denver. Don't ask me any questions, but believe me. You don't realize how dangerous Steele can be, should he have any cause to feel that a person might interfere with his plans."

Jeff was puzzled. Her concern seemed genuine. "Maybe," he decided, "she likes me." Women always had such a difficult time keeping business and their emotions separated.

"Don't worry about me," he said. "I know what I'm doing."

"I think you do," she replied, adding enigmatically: "That's why I told you

"I MAKE SURE EACH BOTTLE IS A BIG, BIG ONE"
"I MAKE SURE IT'S WHOLESOME AND GOOD"
PEPSI-COLA
REFRESHING-SATISF
12 OUNCES
A SPARKLING BEVERAGE
REFRESHING-ENJOYABLE
5¢
12 OZ. BOTTLE

what I did." She stared at him in sudden exasperation. "But you're too sure of yourself to pay any attention to anything I might tell you." She turned away from him in abrupt dismissal.

JEFF was humming softly to himself as he entered the elevator. It was indeed a pleasant feeling to have a lady swindler of Miss Ray's youth and charm take a personal interest in one.

"Seven," he directed the elevator boy. He produced a silver dollar. "Locate Jimmy Ranger, the house dick, and have him come up to my room, will you?"

"Yes, *sir,* Mr. Gorman."

When you want to find somebody, call a cop, Jeff thought. And he was very anxious, indeed, to find George Ray's prosperous-looking companion. There had been a man who had the look of one who invested money in things—like helium fields or anything with a get-rich-quick smell to it.

As it turned out, it had not been necessary for him to call a cop. On entering his room he found Jimmy Ranger already there, pointing an exceptionally large automatic at him as he opened the door.

"Hello," Jeff said pleasantly. He raised his hands. On the far side of the room was a second man, seated on a chair with his hands conspicuously placed on his knees, where they would be in plain sight at all times. "Always glad to have company drop in unexpectedly like this. Who's your friend?"

"That's what I want to know," the house detective said. "I came in here and found him using your telephone. He's done a nice job of wrecking your room."

Jeff looked around. "He didn't miss," he said angrily. Even the linings of his suits had been ripped to pieces, and Jeff was very particular about his clothes. He lowered his hand to have a look for the shoe tree.

"Keep 'em up, Mr. Gorman," Ranger said. "You got a gun?"

"After all, this is my room," Jeff protested. He spread his coat open, however, and turned around, flipping it up over his hips so that Ranger could see he was unarmed.

"O. K.," Ranger said. "Who is this guy?"

"Never saw him before," said Jeff.

Strictly speaking, this was true. Undoubtedly this man was one of the two who had stood behind Steele's desk in the shadows the previous night. His capture meant that the members of the group still active were Steele himself, Ray, Roberta, Nada, the chauffeur and the big squarehead who had accompanied Nada this morning. This further whittling down of his staff was likely to make Mr. Steele very nervous and possibly very dangerous. He might even change his plans. However, the man couldn't be turned loose now, but Jeff wished that Ranger had exercised his detecting abilities elsewhere. "Incidentally, what are you doing in my room, Ranger?"

"Oh, I just thought I'd look around and see what you were up to," Ranger said calmly. His homely, freckled face never changed expression. "I got to thinking over some of the things you said and did last night and I began having ideas. For instance, you knew that guy the other night had a gun on him. And I saw you put that ring on Miss Gerling's finger. It just made me think some."

Jeff looked at Jimmy Ranger with interest. This was an observant young man. "And what conclusion did you reach, my fine collegiate flatfoot?"

"I decided you are up to no good," Ranger said.

Jeff was slightly startled. "Why?"

Ranger waved his gun toward Steele's man. "You have such nice playmates. Maybe you better tell me what goes on or I'll have to haunt you."

"I'd much rather have you do some haunting for me," Jeff said. He told Ranger he wanted to find out who Ray's companion was. "It's worth twenty dollars to me to find out."

"At twenty bucks a haunt, I am practically your ghost, right now," Ranger said. "However, I still think you better tell me all about this."

"Your persistence is admirable," Jeff said.

"No, it's just that I'm honest," Ranger replied. "Are you?"

"Well, 'honesty' is a very narrow word," Jeff said. "However, my operations are legal. Also, my heart is pure."

"That's nice," Ranger commented. "I could write a book on what you're telling me. Well, what do we do with this guy?"

"Put him in jail," Jeff replied. "You caught him rifling my room, didn't you? Also, he probably has a record as long as your arm. Tell you what: you find out who Ray's companion is and I'll hold this fellow until you get back."

Ranger grinned lazily. "No talkee, no hauntee."

Jeff decided swiftly that Ranger was both trustworthy and competent. "O. K. Here's the lay of the land, but you understand that the police are not to be informed unless and until I decide the time is appropriate."

"I can't promise that," Ranger said. "Not till I know what it is."

"I'll trust your good judgment," Jeff said. Briefly, he outlined the situation.

Ranger whistled. "But you haven't any proof yet, huh?"

Jeff nodded. "That's it. I have to find someone who has been swindled and get the whole story."

Ranger handed Jeff a gun from his side pocket. "This belonged to the yegg. You hold him and I'll see what I can find out about Ray's pal."

When he had left, Jeff located his shoe trees. The papers were gone.

"O. K.," he said to the sullen man in the corner. "Hand 'em over."

"I don't know what you're talking about," the man growled.

"You undoubtedly read the two papers which you found in this shoe tree, because that was the information which you telephoned to Steele when Ranger found you here. Therefore, you are aware of the fact that I've been engaged in the munitions business—illicitly," said Jeff. The word "illicit" made it sound much more ominous.

He stared at the man coldly. "Just keep your hands on your knees and forget about making a jump for me. I want those papers. As you, yourself, can realize, a man in my profession would think nothing of shooting a burglar and explaining that you tried to escape." Jeff smiled slightly. "Particularly as it would all be so legal. I've shot so many men, anyway, that one more wouldn't make the slightest bit of difference."

Steele's man looked at Jeff, who had never even shot clay pigeons, and decided he never had seen a man so capable of cold-blooded murder. He handed over the papers.

"You won't need them in jail, anyway," Jeff said. The telephone interrupted him.

"Mr. Gorman?"

"Yes."

"H. Patrick Handley speakin'."

Jeff was shocked. He'd forgotten all about Mr. Handley since discovering the Nazis were not Nazis.

"Where are you?" he asked weakly. Mr. Handley was not going to appreciate this situation, and there was nothing Jeff liked less than facing an old school tie with news that he was on a wild-goose chase.

"At the airport," Handley said. "Suppose you run out heah and we'll chat. Make sure you're not followed."

"Right-ho," said Jeff, who was susceptible to Oxford. "Be along shortly."

"Right-ho," said Handley.

It was twenty minutes before Jimmy returned, and Jeff could visualize H. Patrick Handley's impatience. Jimmy's entrance was something of an explosion.

"I found out who he was, all right!" he exclaimed. "You'd never guess. Phineas T. Gardiner."

"The New York financier?" Jeff asked incredulously. Ranger nodded.

"They had their meeting up in Nada's room," he reported. "She wasn't there, though; she was down in the lobby. I followed Gardiner. He's stopping at the Antlers Hotel."

"Swell work," Jeff said. He paid Ranger the twenty dollars he had promised him and added ten more. "Take care of this fellow and don't bring my name into it. I've got an appointment. See you later."

"You want anybody else haunted?" Ranger asked. Jeff stopped in the doorway. "Yeah, keep an eye on George Ray."

CHAPTER X.

THE PLAN COMPLETED.

JEFF was halfway down the corridor to the elevator when a piercing whistle almost lifted him from his skin.

"Telephone," Jimmy Ranger called softly, having attained Jeff's undivided attention. He was standing just outside the door of Jeff's room with the automatic in his hand, and he passed this information along without moving his head.

Jeff returned on the run, or as nearly so as his stiffening leg would permit. Jimmy Ranger was a young man who acted with speed and considerable purpose. "How would you like to work for me?" Jeff said, grabbing the telephone.

Ranger's eyes were bright, but he held himself to a noncommittal shrug. "I could think of worse ideas."

"We'll talk it over later," Jeff remarked. "Hello."

"This is Mason at the Miners & Drovers Bank," he was informed by the banker's hearty voice. "How are you getting along?"

"Very well," Jeff said.

"Got some news for you," Mason declared. "That picture you gave me of Roberta Ray is not Roberta Ray at all."

"What?" Jeff demanded. Of all the things he least expected, this was it. "Who is she? How do you know so quickly? Are you sure?"

Mason chuckled with genuine enjoyment. "We bankers are not so moss-grown, you know. I sent the pictures down to the telephone company and arranged to have them transmitted by wire to the Southwest Trust at Oklahoma City. Miss Roberta Ray is making a tour of South America. Nobody knows who the beautiful blonde is, Mr. Gorman, but she isn't Miss Ray."

Jeff clucked his tongue. "How about the other picture?"

"That's Ray, all right," Mason said. "They told me there was no mistake possible there. Picture's a dead ringer for him."

"You do move fast," Jeff said. "Thanks a lot. Anything else?"

"Brown will have those stockholder lists for you in the morning," Mason said. "This is a swindle, isn't it?"

"Yeah," Jeff told him, unguardedly. "I'll fill you in on it in the morning." Suddenly it occurred to him that he was telling everybody what went on. "Leave this in my hands," he added.

Mason's voice was reassuring: "Naturally."

Hanging up, he jerked his head at Steele's captured man. "Take him off some place," he instructed Ranger. "I have an important call to make."

Nada Gerling was in her room. "Are you alone?" Jeff asked.

"I was just going to call you," she said. "Your offer still stands?"

"Yes," he said.

"Five thousand dollars," she continued. "In cash?"

"In cash," Jeff said.

"All right." There was decision and quick relief in her voice. "Come here at seven o'clock sharp. Be prompt. I will only have about ten minutes to talk with you and then I'm going to leave Denver as fast as I can."

"I'll be there at seven," Jeff said. "You understand, you are to give me the whole picture."

"I'll tell you everything I know," Nada replied.

"Who is Roberta Ray?" Jeff asked.

Nada gasped. "That's something I don't know," she said.

"Is anybody following me?" Jeff asked.

"The man who was with me this morning," she said. She laughed a little. "He lost you when your cab made a U turn, but he's waiting in the lobby for you now."

"Thanks," Jeff said. "One more question, now: does Steele still think I believe he's a Nazi?"

"Yes; he thinks you're a crooked munitions dealer and want to get hold of the field for your own purposes," she said. "Are you?"

Jeff laughed. "You answer questions. I ask 'em."

The news about Roberta Ray had been a nasty shock and he was still thinking about it as he reached the lobby. Here he had been thinking of her as a fine, American type of girl; honest, but misled by her desire to help her brother—and the guy wasn't even her brother!

"Johnny," he remarked to the elevator boy, "never trust appearances."

"You're tellin' me?" asked Johnny. "I buy a watch yesterday from a guy. It's a swell-lookin' watch, see, and it's supposed to be hot. Today it ain't runnin'."

"Such is life," said Jeff. "I just had much the same experience."

Jeff hurried through the lobby, looking at no one, and hobbled into the writting room at a lop-gaited run. Or close to it. There was no one else present and Jeff began digging about frantically in a waste-paper basket.

The big squarehead who had been with Nada that morning steamed into the room after him in full cry.

"Ah," Jeff shouted. "There it is!"

He stared into the basket in fascination. "I'm rich!"

The Teutonic-looking gentleman stepped quickly to his side and stared into the basket himself. "There what is?" he demanded, pressing the gun in his pocket into Jeff's ribs. Jeff lowered the basket.

"Don't touch it," he said. "I'll yell for the cops if you do."

"Don't touch what?" the guy demanded.

"Don't you see it in the basket, you

fool?" Jeff asked. He raised the basket high. "Have a look at the biggest diamond you ever saw in your life."

Startled, the man peered into the basket, and Jeff stepped to one side, slamming the metal receptacle over his shadower's head.

"Life," he commented to himself as he rode out to the airport unshadowed, "would be so complicated if crooks were not, as a general thing, so stupid. It must be exasperating to Mr. Steele to have to depend on such dumb confederates."

He turned his thoughts to Mr. H. Patrick Handley. After a time, he began humming "Drink To Me Only With Thine Eyes."

THERE was no mistaking Mr. H. Patrick Handley at the airport, although Jeff had been a bit lax on this point, having neglected to ask him if he would be wearing green socks or a pink tie or something. As a matter of fact he was without both these articles, but his London tailor had made it a simple matter to pick him out. Otherwise, Mr. Handley was not a man you would look at twice, being somewhat roly poly and running a small pouch. He had a nice, round and beefy-hued complexion and seemed like a man who was ready at the drop of a hat to deliver a luncheon speech on car loadings in Minneapolis. At his side was a long, lean, leathery gentleman of indefinite age and a wandering vacant stare which was either taking in the whole place or saw nothing whatever; Jeff was unable to decide which.

"Mr. Handley," Jeff said.

H. Patrick inspected him critically and then grasped Jeff's hand cordially. "How'do," he said. "No one followed you?"

"I put a waste-paper basket over my shadow's head," Jeff said. "It confused him some."

"Not 'rilly?" said H. Patrick. He appeared a bit disappointed, but it was apparent he could appreciate a man so handy with a waste-paper basket. "This is Mr. Lovington; he takes an interest in geology and that sort of thing. Had nothin' else to do so he came along. Nice trip."

"How do you do, professor," Jeff said—even such a rank amateur in matters touching upon minerals as himself recalling that Lovington had discovered one of Royal Atlantic's biggest South American oil deposits. Jeff felt a momentary qualm at wasting so much of their time; but, after all, he hadn't known he was wasting their time when he called Handley.

"Thought it might be better to chat out here at the airport," Handley said. "Quiet."

They seated themselves in a lunchroom, Handley remarking: "Bad limp you got there, old man? Old Smith-Fosdick didn't say anything about you having a bad leg. Something recent?"

Jeff reported on the affair with the automobile, and his two companions looked delighted. "Evidently mean business," H. Patrick remarked. "Sounds most interestin'. Now, what does this fellow look like?"

Jeff described Steele, and Handley shook his head. Jeff then described everything which had happened excepting his bank visit and his own conclusions.

"Odd," said H. Patrick. "Might be a new bunch workin' out of Mexico, but I don't place any of them. If you don't mind my askin', what's your interest—personally, I mean?"

"Well, if you and Mr. Lovington see anything interesting, I'll exercise my stock option," Jeff replied.

"Of course," Handley said. He brooded for a time. "Don't like that mistake in identity. Seems a bit fishy. However, we might as well pop down and have a look. Can't ever tell what they're up to. You sort of take care of things around here. Now, you say this chap Ray has phoned a tax inspector will be out to have a look?"

Jeff nodded. "That's me. But you can be me and I'm here, so if Mitchell and Steele have communicated, they're likely to think Ray was telling the truth. However, I'm not sure—"

H. Patrick held up his hand. "Follow you. Don't give it a thought. Reckon maybe I could talk with like this heah kinda Texas drawl."

Jeff grinned. "I guess you can take care of yourself. Be on your guard though—place is isolated. About seventy miles from Albuquerque. You'll have to rent a car. When do you want to leave—tomorrow?"

"Right now is all right," Handley said.

"I don't think there's a plane," Jeff said, a bit startled.

"Charter one." Handley got up. "Nice to have seen you. Telephone you at your hotel as soon as we find out anything." His expression changed suddenly to one of intent watchfulness. He jerked his head. "Friend of yours?"

At the next table was the big squarehead. "Yeah," Jeff said. "How long's he been here. Thought I'd lost him."

"Just came in," Handley said. "Seemed very interested in you—made a beeline for that table. Very careless. Should have clipped him. Take him away from here." Handley raised his voice and exercised his Texas accent. "Glad to have seen you, Jeff. Sorry I can't see much in your proposition, but nice of you to think of me. Look me up when you're in Dallas."

He shook hands heartily. Lovington shook hands and they departed.

Jeff patted his writing-room companion on the shoulder. "Come on, Adolph. You might as well ride back in the cab with me. There are times when the presence of dumb animals is very comforting."

CHAPTER XI.

POUND FOOLISH.

THEY were almost back to the hotel when Jeff broke the prolonged silence.

"Adolph," he said, "I am going to let you in on some very interesting information."

"Ya?" said the big man, suspiciously.

"Ya," said Jeff. "See that policeman on the corner? Right there by the hotel entrance?"

"Ya," said his companion.

"Well, if you follow me, after I get out of this cab," Jeff declared, "he's going to arrest you."

Adolph looked startled. Finally he expressed himself. "Nuts."

"An old Prussian term, I presume," Jeff remarked, alighting from the cab. "I'll pay the bill."

He lowered his voice as he spoke to the cabby, Adolph's watchful eyes on him: "Want to make ten bucks?"

"Don't ask foolish questions," the driver said.

Jeff gave him the ten. "When I walk away, jump out of the cab and grab that other guy and ask him how about the fare. Don't take any back talk from him. Yell at him. Make a lot of commotion. I paid my half, but he was trying to walk out on his. Joke! Get it?"

"Sure," said the cabby. "Get along with your walking. If there was enough wacks like you we'd have prosperity back again."

Jeff started swiftly off. So did Adolph. So did the cabby, yelling, "Where's my fare." Adolph was intent on Jeff. The cabby grabbed him, hollering: "Come on! Trying to beat me out of my fare, huh?" Adolph was astonished. He saw Jeff step into a cab and jumped for another one. The driver grabbed him. The cop came on the run. Spectators gathered.

Jeff drove off.

At the Antlers Hotel, he found that Mr. Phineas T. Gardiner was not in his room. He sought to have him paged.

"He never answers pages," the bell captain informed Jeff. "Likes his privacy." Money changed hands. "He's in the bar," Jeff was informed. And so he was. By himself in a corner, hidden behind a newspaper.

"Good afternoon," said Jeff.

Mr. Gardiner looked up, and his heavy, red face folded itself into lines of disapproval as he viewed Jeff with frosty, small blue eyes. "I don't know you, young man," Mr. Gardiner said gruffly. "And I don't want to know you. Furthermore, if you persist in talking to me I will summon the manager."

"That wouldn't help me any," Jeff replied pleasantly. "I want to talk about helium and I don't think he knows anything about helium fields in New Mexico. Or a man named Steele. Or Ray."

A very faint look of alarm passed over Mr. Gardiner's face. "Don't know what you're talking about," he said gruffly. "Furthermore, I'm not interested."

"Don't be alarmed," Jeff said. "I'm not a government man. However, I do know that you've been a victim of a swindle. I'll tell you about it."

Gardiner looked at him sharply.

"What's your business, mister?"

"On a small scale and in a somewhat different manner, I'm in the same business as you," Jeff said. He introduced himself. "I buy things and sell them, finance propositions and such, and try to pick up a dollar here and there."

Mr. Gardiner looked him over carefully. "Eccentric people amuse me. If you want to tell me stories, go ahead. Have a drink?"

"Thanks," Jeff said. "Buttermilk."

"Buttermilk?" Mr. Gardiner's face folded itself into lines of deep astonishment. It was apparent that this statement shook him more than anything yet said.

"Buttermilk," Jeff confirmed.

With disapproval in every feature, Mr. Gardiner summoned the barman. "This gentleman would like a glass of buttermilk."

The barman fixed Jeff with a stern eye. "Yes, sir. What will you have?"

"Buttermilk."

The barman blinked. The man seemed serious. "Buttermilk?"

"Buttermilk!"

With the attitude of one dealing with a dangerous radical, he summoned a waiter. "Buttermilk for this gentleman."

The waiter smiled tentatively. "Ha," he said. "Buttermilk."

"Buttermilk," said Jeff.

The waiter looked at the serious faces about him, shrugged his shoulders in defeat and waddled off. "O. K., buttermilk."

"The stuff must be illegal in Denver," Jeff commented.

"Are you a teetotaler?" Mr. Gardiner asked curiously.

"No, I haven't anything against the stuff, except that one drink leads to another. I carry my office around in my hat, so I have to do a lot of thinking on my feet, if you follow me; that makes it necessary for me to be able to rely on my feet to perform their appointed duties. My type of financial activity takes odd turns at times and I frequently have to move myself away from unpleasant situations in a hurry."

"Sounds rather illegal," said Gardiner, with interest.

"On the contrary, I am one of the most legal of men, but the persons with whom I deal from time to time, such as Mr. Ray and Mr. Steele, quite frequently are not."

Gardiner scrutinized Jeff carefully. "Get on with your bedtime story, young man," he said finally.

"This is a story about a man named Gardiner. His identity was mistaken for a man named Ray, and this is what happened to him," Jeff said, continuing from there with his construction of the manner in which victims were approached. Then he told how he was approached himself.

"A very interesting story, but, unfortunately, fantastic," Gardiner said. "However, what was the conclusion of this story?"

"I'd like to buy your stock," Jeff said, giving his bank references.

Gardiner stared at him, then smiled. "If it's worth anything to you, it ought to be worth something to me."

Jeff shook his head. "Nope. It's just worth money to me."

"I'll sit tight," Gardiner said. "I have to stay in Denver a few days anyway."

Jeff got up. "Your neck is already stuck out a yard, so it isn't necessary for me to request that you don't communicate with Ray about my offer," he said. "I am only going to protect the suckers who sell to me. It would make you look very silly in Wall Street if it were found out you had fallen for a swindle concerning a nonexistent helium field."

"You're not as smart as you think you are," Gardiner said. "There is a helium field. I sent a man down to investigate it."

JEFF was in the depths of a deep depression when he returned to the hotel. Gardiner had refused to explain any further his reference to the presence of helium and they had parted on the worst of terms. Jeff was worried. Gardiner was known as a cold-turkey, hardboiled proposition, and the more Jeff thought about it the more he became convinced that not even under threats of harm to himself or family, the appealing story and big gray eyes of Roberta or Ray's smooth line and the tempting financial inducement would Gardiner go into any proposition blindfolded.

Jimmy Ranger met him at the door. "What's the matter?" he asked. "Did your British friend explode in a dignified fashion?"

Jeff shook his head. "I got bit by a wolf," he said, explaining his unsettling conversation with Phineas T. Gardiner.

"Don't be a sucker," Ranger said. "He can fall for a pair of weepy gray eyes just as easy as you can. He's not too old. And he'd scare a lot easier. A guy like him gets around. He knows how ruthless people can be and he's probably figured the buy was insurance that might even pay dividends. I'll bet he didn't even come out here to see about that deal. Just inquired in passing."

"That doesn't explain his remark about the helium," Jeff said. "What if they have got helium down there? I'd have to change all my plans."

"I don't know what your plans are, but if those babies have a nice rich deposit of helium-bearing gas, they wouldn't be around playing Nazi and peddling stock in the Pueblo State Oil

NADA

Corp," Ranger said. "That old buzzard, Gardiner, sees you want his stock, so he figures you know something. He can afford to play along. He probably threw that remark out just to see what it would do to you; angling for information."

Jeff considered this. "I feel better, Jimmy," he said, eying the husky freckle-faced detective with admiration. "How's the haunting business coming?"

"Ray hasn't been any place—just moping around here," Ranger replied. "Roberta, too. Say, listen, you need an assistant. Permanent. How about it?"

Jeff grinned. "O. K., you're on the pay roll. A hundred a week when I've got it, bonuses in particularly affluent periods and forage for yourself if and when I go broke."

Ranger nodded happily. "Thanks. I think I'll hang onto my hotel job, though. I can't go running around poking my nose into strange rooms and carrying a gun and passkey if I am an ordinary citizen."

"O. K.," Jeff said absently. "I'm still a little worried about Gardiner's remark. I think I'll go up to Ray's room and force the issue just to see what happens."

A sudden smile lit up Jeff's dark face. "We must give this an artistic touch," he said, handing Jimmy a five-dollar bill. "Call up the Albuquerque newspapers and tell them Professor Cecil Lovington, the noted British geologist, is coming in tonight by chartered plane. Then hang up." He had a further thought. Producing a substantial roll of bills, he said: "Charter a plane at Albuquerque and have the pilot fly me up tomorrow morning's paper—last edition. I want to be sure to get it before H. Patrick Handley and the professor return from their jaunt to the helium field. Tell the guy you charter the plane from 'No publicity' in connection with his peculiar assignment."

"O. K." Jimmy shrugged. "I'll have to get used to things like this, I guess."

George Ray didn't appear any too happy to see him, and Jeff concluded that he had heard that another member of Steele's staff was among the missing and Adolph among the ditched. Roberta, however, was cordial.

Jeff dropped into a chair and exploded his bomb without warning. "Glad you called up Mitchell and told him to expect a State tax inspector," he said. "I'm not going myself, but a couple of friends of mine will be there in the morning."

George Ray started visibly. "What? Who?"

"A British agent and Professor Cecil Lovington, the famous British geologist," Jeff told him, casually. "You've heard of him, of course. Man who discovered that big South American oil deposit for Imperial Atlantic. Expert on helium."

Ray buried his head in his hands, his expression as he did so being very near to terror. "My God, what did you do that for?"

Jeff looked at Roberta before he answered. She was staring at him wide-eyed. Her face was deathly pale.

"After all, they're the boys to look it over, aren't they?" Jeff asked. "They're going to buy the helium and they'll give us all the money we need to get into big-scale operation, if this thing is as good as you say it is. Lovington can tell in a minute. And I talked over the money angle with them last night. I was assured that if the deposits warrant, money is no object."

"But . . . but they may get hurt," George Ray stammered. "That would be terrible. Mitchell's ruthless, and if he suspected anything—"

"Oh, they're pretty smooth, and this agent, at least, is an expert at handling such situations," Jeff said. "He always leaves an envelope behind when he goes on expeditions like that—to the British military attaché and the U. S. Military Intelligence, for delivery at a specified time if he doesn't return. A matter of hours. In a last resort, Mitchell would let him go so he and his men would have time to clear out and warn Steele. That would be O. K. for all of us."

"Yeah, that's true," Ray said, but there was no joy in his voice. "When do you expect to hear from them?"

"Around noon tomorrow, I guess," Jeff said. "Then all your troubles will be over. They're ready to spend real money."

CHAPTER XII.

STEELE STRIKES.

JIMMY RANGER looked at his watch. "Almost seven," he remarked. "I think you're just throwing five grand away talking to that dame. After all, you know what this gang is up to now; why pay Nada to tell you what you know?"

"One reason is because I promised her I would," Jeff told him. "A second is I kind of think my friend Adolph might have overheard her say she would call me when she talked to me on the street this morning. That would put her in a pretty dangerous spot. Also, I have a nice little plan worked out, and the more I can learn about Steele, the better."

"What kind of a plan?" Jimmy asked.

"A plan to make your employer some money."

"Do you want me to come up with you?" Jeff's new assistant asked. "It might be a trap of some kind."

"No," Jeff said. "She's leveling with me. You better go down and get about your hotel detecting or you'll get fired."

It was Johnny on Elevator No. 3 who took Jeff from seven to ten. "This calls for a special kind of bet, Johnny," Jeff remarked, flipping a silver dollar. "Even money somebody is standing at the door on ten when you open it."

Johnny consulted his signal board. No lights showed for Floor 10. "You're on, Mr. Gorman," he grinned.

"Well, at least I'm consistent," Jeff said as he left the elevator. "I never win."

Nada didn't answer his knock. Jeff rapped again. Silence. He looked at his watch. Just seven. He frowned, then tried the door. It was unlocked, but there was weight against it. He shoved and saw Nada slide limply across the opening and fall to the floor. The lights were on, and looking down at her in quick concern, he saw a bullet hole in her head from which the blood oozed in a gory, sickening mass from her shattered skull, her beauty blotted out like her life. He looked around the room quickly. It was empty. Cautiously, fighting down the sick feeling in his stomach, he stepped into the room.

Suddenly the report of a heavy-caliber revolver sounded outside the window and reverberated through the room and into the corridor. Jeff threw himself on the floor and something hurtled through the open window, striking the floor beside him. It was an automatic, a .45. Cautiously, Jeff approached the window. Then he saw whence the shot and the revolver had come. A fire escape commanded a view of the room via the mirror on the dressing table. He looked up and down. Nobody was in sight, and the fire escape itself opened onto hall doors which locked from the inside, he knew.

Commotion in the hall recalled his danger. He quickly jumped to the door and shut it. Listening carefully, he heard a confusion of voices and running feet. Nobody knew whence the shot had come.

Suddenly a key was inserted in the door. Jeff was trapped. He did the only thing he could think of doing: stood behind the door. It opened cautiously and Jimmy Ranger stepped into the room, shutting the door swiftly behind him and looking at the body on the floor in horror.

"Jimmy," Jeff said softly. Jimmy started and turned.

"What happened here?" Jimmy demanded. He looked at Nada's body and swore.

"Me, too," Jeff said. "In her own way, she was a swell person—but don't talk so damned loud. I'm in a spot."

Jimmy nodded. "A lot of people in the hall and some of them saw me come in here. Who did it?"

Jeff told him what had happened.

"You know how I got up here so quick?" Jimmy asked. He didn't wait for an answer. "A woman called for the house detective and when I answered she said: 'He's coming into the room! Come up, quick, please! Help!' I knew you were coming up here, too, and I really traveled."

"A beautiful frame-up," Jeff commented.

"Beautiful, hell!" Jimmy said. "It's perfect. All the doors on the fire escape are locked—the guy out there must have shot her. Then some dame placed the phony call to me. The dame leaves. The guy gets out on the fire escape and goes up or down to some door he's propped open. Then he closes it. Ray must have done this. Either he or Steele and that Roberta— Gee, she don't look like that kind of a girl. What are we gonna do?"

Jeff thought quickly. "I can't make the fire escape, even if it would do any good, which it wouldn't, on account of my bum leg. Look; go out and tell them a gun was accidentally discharged. Ask everybody to go to their rooms—you know, the old hokum."

Jimmy let himself out. "Just an accident, folks. The lady didn't know the gun was loaded," he said. There was a nervous titter of laugher. "No harm done, but a hole in the ceiling. I'm the house detective. Everything is under control."

Jeff took advantage of the time to examine the automatic. It wasn't George Ray's gun. He had memorized the serial number of George's gun. Also, only one shell had been fired. That meant the gun which did the shooting and this gun were different. Also, there had been no report heard previously. Silencer.

"All clear," Jimmy whispered, opening the door. Jeff slid out of the room. "There's a door three doors down that says 'Service.' Interior stairs there. I gotta report this."

Jeff reached his own floor without being seen and rang the elevator bell when he saw Johnny's car approaching from above.

"Shucks," Johnny said. "I must have missed you when you came down from ten."

They were alone in the car.

"Stop the car a minute, Johnny," Jeff said.

"A woman was murdered in 1018," Jeff went on, when Johnny had complied with his request. "I was there before the house detective got there, but you're the only person who knows it."

Johnny stared at him, eyes wide and face pale.

"D-d-d-did—" Johnny stuttered.

"No, I didn't do it, but nobody must know I was there for a very important reason," Jeff said. He looked at Johnny with an intense gaze. "You've heard of the Military Intelligence Service, haven't you?"

"Spy chasers," Johnny said. His eyes grew bright with excitement. "Gee, I knew you was in something exciting and dangerous like that, Mr. Gorman."

"I am relying on you to keep silent," Johnny said. "Only you and the house detective know about this. Until tomorrow, not even the police must know of it. You understand."

"Sure, Mr. Gorman," Johnny said, his chest puffing proudly. "You can count on me." Eagerly he added: "Do you know who killed her?"

Jeff nodded. "Yes, but the murderer mustn't know we know or it would prevent something very important from coming off."

Jeff felt considerably better when he got off the elevator. And he had, he reminded himself conscientiously, told no lies. He hadn't said he was a member of the Military Intelligence. He had just asked if Johnny had ever heard of it. And, of course, it *would* prevent something very important from coming off—he wouldn't get hanged, which was important to him!

BUT to avoid execution there was work to be done. Jeff swung into his room without seeming to insert the key in the lock and reached his telephone without seeming to cross the room.

"Room 812," he said into the phone. Bobbie Ray answered the phone. "Say," said Jeff, "the party's rough, isn't it?" Bobbie was painfully silent. "Is there somebody there?" Jeff asked.

"Not now," said Bobbie.

"Are you expecting anyone?" he asked.

"Directly," she said.

"Good. Now listen, Bobbie. There's been a murder committed. You're in it. In it up to your pretty ears. And it may concern you that your boy friend's plan just didn't come off. And if I were you I'd come right down here, because if there's one thing I do not like doing, that's dying for somebody else's crime. Particularly when a pretty little head like yours is in danger. Uncle Jeff can play this game very rough, honey, too. So get down here, on the double-quick. Yesterday, in fact."

Before she could make a reply, Jeff slammed the receiver.

Almost before Jeff had time to plan his attack, Bobbie arrived at his door. He answered her nervous tapping and bade her enter. Though he knew generally what he would do, the outline of his plans was vague. But this mental confusion was somewhat ironed out when he saw the girl. Obviously she was under tremendous strain. The stakes for which she played did not include murder as a by-product. And it was self-evident that she was laboring under a heavy load. Jeff concluded this could be but one thing.

"I don't know how much you know of this killing," he said, with telling effect, "but one thing I can tell you, and with authority."

"I don't know what you are talking about," she stammered.

"Take it easy, beautiful," Jeff stated. "You know—but how much is another matter. You know something, and you're scared stiff. That's why you're here!"

An answer to that shaft was not necessary. It struck a responsive chord. Anything she could, or might, have said would have been belied by the expression of her face, contorted in concern.

"I see I'm right," Jeff said, "so here's your choice. No bungling effort to pin a cheap murder on me is going to stick. So you can get in my back yard and save your neck or play cops and robbers with your clumsy playmates and find yourself facing a death penalty!"

Bobbie gasped. She almost spoke. But Jeff stopped her.

"In the first place, I didn't go to Nada's room alone," he lied. Bobbie grew very grave and suddenly sat down. "Ah," said Jeff, "I see that strikes home. Wouldn't I be a fool to open myself to playing with fire without a fireman around?

"You're an accessory, beautiful," he continued, "and I'm not going to make a habit of dying for other crimes than my own at this late stage. So are you on my team, or still with the chumps?"

"What do you want me to do?" she said flatly.

"Tell everything you know," he said, and then, after a pause, "in good time. Time is too precious now. We must act. First, you get back to that room and see that George Ray stays in his. If he's not there when you get back, call me. If he is, keep him there on any pretense. If he should leave, call me at once. But he must not leave this hotel tonight without my knowing it. I'll wait right here!"

"What do I get out of it? And what about Nada?" she asked.

"You get your own neck. And as for Nada, she was all right in her way and she's probably better off out of trouble. But I can't square one thing without the other. Tomorrow we play for big stakes. Stakes bigger than you were playing for in this phony little game. We are playing for your life, and, yes, I guess I'm gambling for my own."

Jeff Gorman paused. He hadn't thought of the situation as analytically as that before. The stakes were higher than dollars and cents. What good could he possibly accomplish if he did defeat Steele and Ray if he suddenly found himself very dead? His breath came in short gasps. He wasn't frightened. He was mad.

"Get back to that room and watch that guy, if you have to sleep with one eye open!" he demanded crisply.

"All right," she said hesitantly, "only I—"

"Only what?" he snapped.

"I'm supposed to get something from this room," Bobbie said. "They know you dealt—"

"In munitions," he interrupted, "and they want a couple of papers I have in this room to prove it. O. K. Only how were you to get them?"

"Rifle your room, if necessary!"

"If necessary!" Jeff hooted. "They've practically had an all-day search going through my things since yesterday. At least two of your erstwhile playmates are in the clink over taking liberties with my linens."

"Oh," sighed Bobbie. "They couldn't get 'em."

"No," and Jeff was jaunty again, "but they didn't ask for them in a nice way. Besides I'm a sucker for gray eyes. They're inside that left shoe tree, right at your feet."

Bobbie looked at him in astonishment. She bent over and extracted the papers, and looked back at him in utter bewilderment.

"Don't worry," said Jeff. "Those papers will do me more good in Steele's hands than where they are."

Suddenly Jeff stopped. He hummed a bar of "Drink To Me Only With Thine Eyes" and jumped to his feet. He paced the room, rubbing his hands over his stomach.

"Bobbie," he said, at length, "here's the play. And here's the reason. You are to tell that mob of cutthroats that there's a rumor I've been pinched for murder and for resisting arrest. Tell 'em that phony shot attracted the house detective and I shot at him, trying to get away. That pins things on me worse than even they think they are. And give them those papers, to clinch their hold on me!"

"But why?" she asked.

"Because, Bobbie," said Jeff, convincingly, "when a swindler gets everything, including the law, on his side, he becomes overconfident. That story of the rumor and those papers will lull them to sleep, confident that I am the prize sucker of all time."

"Aren't you?" she questioned.

"You'll be surprised," he said, "only

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UPSET STOMACH – ONIONS
DENTAL DECAY – LIQUOR
TOBACCO
SEN-SEN
FOR THE BREATH
5¢
THROAT EASE
VALUABLE TO SINGERS AND SPEAKERS
DON'T OFFEND...USE SEN-SEN
BREATH SWEETENER . . . DELIGHTFUL CONFECTION

not nearly as much as George Ray—who isn't your brother, by the way—and Herr Steele!"

The last stab left Bobbie reeling. She was certain that Jeff was reading her mind, her thoughts and her fears. She was ready at that moment to do anything he commanded, convinced it was the right thing. She revealed it in her sudden admiration for him. The masquerade was over, and she would not have to explain anything. Jeff patted her on the head and let her out the door.

CHAPTER XIII.

MR. RAY IS SHOCKED!

JIMMY RANGER woke Jeff up at seven o'clock in the morning. "Here are your Albuquerque papers with pictures of Professor Lovington spread all over the front page and much conjecture about what he's looking for in that neck of the woods. I didn't realize he was such a well-known duck in his line."

Jeff inspected the copies of the Albuquerque *Journal* with satisfaction. "Now for a call on the Rays," he said. "Mr. Ray is going to be shocked no end."

That was understatement. Ray turned pallid and his hands shook when he opened the door to find Jeff standing there.

"What's the matter with you?" Jeff asked. "Look like you'd seen a ghost."

"I'm . . . I'm not well this morning," he said.

Roberta gasped and collapsed weakly into a chair. She was, Jeff decided, a superb actress. George rushed to get her a glass of water, but he had a mean, suspicious look in his eyes as he gave it to her.

"Guess we're all upset about Nada Gerling," George said. "That man Steele won't stop at anything. I don't feel safe. Did you hear about it?"

"Oh, yes," Jeff said. "Very muchly. The police came around to see me about it. I ushered her home that night, you know—took her up to her room. They wanted to know about that. I didn't have much trouble. Said I picked her up in the lobby. Funny thing is, I had an appointment to see her at seven o'clock."

"You . . . you didn't keep it?" George asked.

Jeff shook his head. "Forgot all about it. So many things happened during the day."

George Ray shot a poisonous glance at Roberta.

"Most peculiar of all," Jeff added, "a rumor got around the hotel that I had been found in her room by the house detective and tried to get away. And he took a shot at me. Luckily, nobody shot him, so he was able to testify that the room was empty."

Jeff seated himself and threw the Albuquerque paper to George. "Steele's little internal squabbles don't concern us, however. Brutal, but what can you expect among people like that? There's something in that paper that's really important. There are times when I could gladly shoot a few news men and this is one of them. They got wind of Lovington being in town, and look at the play they gave the story. Of course, they won't be able to find out what he's doing, but in two days every oil man in the country will be snooping around."

George Ray stared at Lovington's picture in fascination, then carefully read the story. His hands were still trembling. Over his shoulder Roberta framed the words: "Don't leave me." Jeff shook his head. He accompanied them to breakfast and returned to their rooms with them, instructing the telephone operator to relay any call for him to George Ray's room.

"None of us has anything to do until we get word from New Mexico, so we might as well do it together," Jeff said pleasantly. George Ray twice excused himself to get cigarettes, and both times Jeff accompanied him. Ray was terrified. He couldn't contact Steele. He didn't know how much Jeff knew. He was afraid to run and afraid to stay.

At last Jeff's call came.

"Wild-goose chase, old man," Handley said. "Can't understand it. All they had down there was a two-derrick operation and not even good producing oil wells."

"What?" Jeff exclaimed. He could sense Ray reaching toward his pocket for a gun.

"You know, I think those people must be swindlers," Handley continued. "Has all the earmarks, what?"

"Great!" Jeff yelled in wild enthusiasm. "That's marvelous."

"What? What?"

"Wonderful," Jeff continued. "No kiddin'. Yes, you're perfectly right. Yes, I'll give you all the details later."

"Say, what is this?" Handley asked.

"Yes, I'll get in touch with Washington, too," Jeff said. "Many thanks and I'll call you tonight."

"Say, are you running some kind of a game of your own?" Handley inquired angrily.

"Of course I am," Jeff replied heartily. "However, I didn't realize how great the possibilities were until you called me."

Handley actually laughed. "Well, I'll play along. John Smith-Fosdick said you could be valuable to us, so if you can convert, go ahead."

"Many thanks," Jeff replied, with sincerity. "We'll get right at it. . . . Not really? That's odd. Suppose there's some explanation—"

He hung up and turned to Ray exultantly. He pumped Ray's hand and kissed Roberta. They stared at him in blank astonishment.

"Lovington said it's undoubtedly one of the greatest helium deposits in the world," he yelled. "They got out there at dawn and Lovington took one look and said the terrain was perfect. Knew right away the stuff was there from a look at the oil they were pumping. However, he made a test at a lab in Albuquerque and says the content is tremendous."

Roberta recovered first. "That's wonderful!" She bit her lip as she looked at Jeff, sudden laughter welling up in her eyes.

"There's only one funny thing about it," Jeff said. "There wasn't any plant there and both the wells were capped. Lovington had a devil of a time getting his stuff for the test. Had to send back to Albuquerque for some kind of equipment or something—crew of men. I don't understand just what. But why do you suppose they were capped and nobody around?"

Ray shook his head. "I don't know," he said feebly. "Something must have scared Mitchell out. Maybe Steele suspected you of something like this. I told you the plant unit was portable, didn't I?"

Jeff shook his head. "No, but that explains it."

"Well, I've got things to do," Jeff said, feeling it was safe to leave Roberta now. "I'll see you later."

"Where are you going?" Ray asked.

"Got to get in touch with those British people in Washington and get my bank to work locating as much of that stock as I can buy before this leaks out. Boy, this is worth millions! See you later."

AT the corner drugstore, Jeff's speed abated. He stepped into a phone booth and called Mr. Gardiner.

"My offer is still open and there isn't any helium down there," he told the New York financier. "You want to sell?"

"No," Gardiner replied, chuckling. "I've been checking up on you and heard some very astonishing things. Of course, you're a heavy gambler, but if you want to buy, you must have a reason. I'll just sit tight for a while."

"Last chance," Jeff said. "The stuff won't be worth a nickel by tomorrow."

"I'll take that chance," Gardiner said.

"Well, I just didn't want you to forget me," Jeff said. "I'd like to have the opportunity of doing a man like you a favor. We might meet again sometime. Don't forget, I tried to get you some of your dough back."

"I'll remember, providing you live long enough to see me again," Gardiner said. "Good-by."

Jeff made a beeline for the Miners & Drovers Bank.

"Are my funds here from San Francisco?" he asked Mason.

The banker nodded. "How are things going?" he asked.

"Not so good," Jeff replied. "A woman got murdered last night and I feel partially responsible."

Mason stared at him.

"Here's the story," Jeff said. "Do you want to ask Mr. Brown to step in or—"

"Certainly," Mason said.

Brown appeared, looking almost cheerful. "I have those stockholder lists you wanted. Three men in Denver, together with Phineas T. Gardiner of New York, a Mr. Masterson of Los Angeles and George Ray are the largest stockholders. The holdings of all the Denver men and Gardiner were acquired in the last quarter."

Jeff grinned delightedly. "Fine. Now I've got a pretty grim story to tell you."

When he had finished, Mason whistled softly and Brown cleared his throat three or four times and looked at Jeff in alarm. "I really can't think it's— Oh, well, banks get involved in the strangest matters these days."

"This is all confidential." Jeff smiled. "From what you know of me through Rossi, I think you have reason to trust me. I have a plan whereby I can break this game up and restore at least a part of the money which these victims have lost. As the three Denver men are customers of yours, I'd like to have you see if you can get them together today. I want to buy their stock. You might simply tell them that you have a customer for it. They don't need to know that you know anything of the swindle, because it would embarrass them. Of course, there is nothing in this for the bank, but you will be helping to break up a racket and you'll be instrumental in helping them to retrieve a part of their losses."

Brown and Mason exchanged glances.

"We're with you," Mason said. "Say on."

"First, I have to know the current valuation of the stock," Jeff said.

Brown answered: "Approximately seven dollars, and it'll never go any higher. Not on its merits, anyway. It's worth about thirty cents, I should imagine. Seven dollars is just an asking price and too high—no takers."

"Well, I'll take options at seven dollars," Jeff said. He explained his plan. Mason grinned, and even Brown smiled slightly, then added with caution: "You stand to lose forty-five thousand dollars. It's purely a gamble."

"I like gambles," Jeff replied.

SOMETIME later Brown called Jeff, who was awaiting his message. "I've assembled them after considerable effort. Come right down."

All three victims were wealthy, middle-aged businessmen who looked the part. They were uneasy when Jeff, after introductions and the withdrawal of the banker, began to speak.

"I asked the three of you to be here together because it is possible that if you were not able to compare experiences, you might not believe me," Jeff said. "You're all in the same boat. All of you, under the compulsion of threats and an appeal to your sympathy, among other reasons, have been the victims of a swindle. You may also include me in the party. Here, roughly, is what happened to you, and why."

Jeff related the swindling method Steele employed. "The details may not be exact, but the theme was probably similar. I hear no dissenting voices, so I will go on. There is no helium. Ray is in league with Steele. Miss Roberta Ray is not his sister. A British Intelligence officer has investigated the alleged field and Professor Cecil Lovington accompanied him. I had their negative report today. I realize you don't want to press charges because it would be embarrassing to you from a business standpoint. On the other hand, I am sure you would like to see yourselves avenged and a stop put to this racket. And you would like to get some of your money back."

Jeff smiled and continued: "I can promise you all of these points without the necessity of your appearing in this case at all. However, I need your stock to accomplish my purpose. Having been singled out as a victim myself, I have discovered a way to swindle the swindlers. That is one of the little ways I have of making money now and then. What you paid for your shares in the Pueblo company I don't know or care, but I offer you the current face value, which Mr. Brown estimates at approximately seven dollars per share. I'll take options on your stock at that price now if you care to go along and promise you freedom from further worry and no publicity. What do you say?"

The three men looked at each other sheepishly, and after a few questions they said yes, formed a Swindlers Luncheon Club and invited Jeff to be the guest of honor as soon as he was able to tell them more about the affair and how he concluded it.

CHAPTER XIV.

MARKET CLOSED!

BACK in his hotel room, Jeff called Jimmy Ranger to him and telephoned Bobbie. He told her:

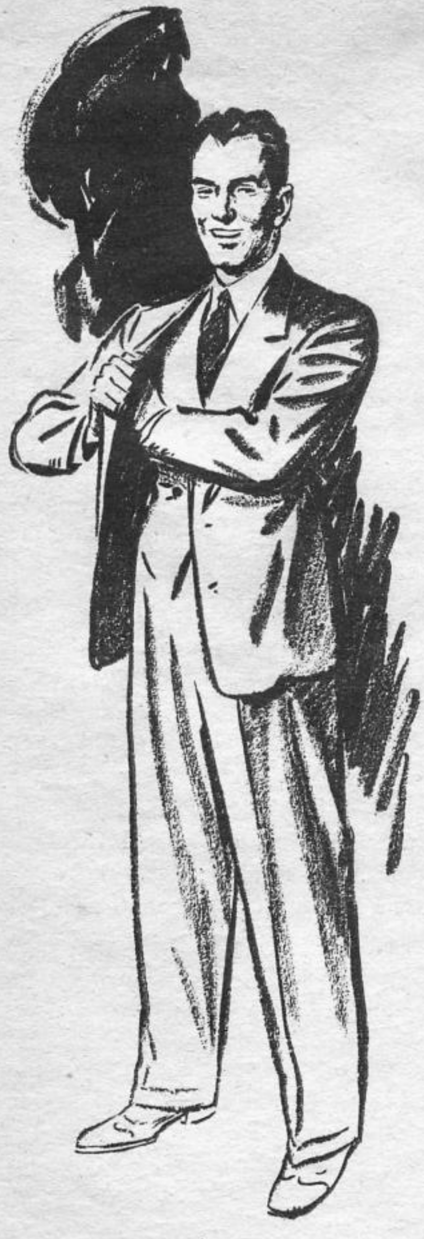
"I'll be down in a few minutes. After I've stated my opening shot, excuse yourself and get into the other room. Telephone Steele that I'm there with a gun on George and hang up."

"Somewhere along that corridor," he said to Ranger, "there's a room, or bend, or something. I want you to hide behind it until Steele comes. He's a thickset fellow with no neck, and eyes like cannon balls. When he comes into Ray's room, step right in behind him and poke your gun in his back!"

"Fun!" said Ranger.

"Yeh," replied Jeff. "It's playing with thunder crackers, and here's hoping they don't go off in my hand."

In the hotel corridor, opposite the en-



trance to the Ray rooms, there was a linen closet. Jimmy Ranger got into it, the door opened on a crack sufficient for him to peer down the length of hallway. Jeff knocked on Ray's door. George Ray opened it. He had a bad case of nerves. The rooms were blue with smoke, and cigarette butts littered every ash tray. Yet, with it all, Ray wore an expression of confidence.

"When are you going to get that money?" he snapped.

"I wanted to talk to you about that," he said. "Sit down." There was an inflection in his voice which made Ray stare at him. Jeff slid his hand into his right jacket pocket and seemed to finger something there.

"What's going on here?" he demanded. He turned to Roberta and snapped, "Do you know anything about this?"

The girl had not said a word since Jeff entered the room. She was a good actress, all right, he decided. For she suddenly clouded her face with an expression of despair.

"You've made a slight mistake," said Jeff. "In fact, you've made several." He moved his hand in his pocket. "Don't make any more. Keep your hands on your knees and let's talk this thing over like sensible swindlers."

"What?" screamed Ray.

"You heard me," said Jeff, "and don't get indignant and say a lot of things that'll waste time. I'm here on business. You're a phony—which is your privilege. But one privilege I reserve for myself is to do my own killing. In short, I don't want you or anybody else running around shooting people and blaming it on me."

"You're crazy," snarled Ray.

"Maybe I am," said Jeff, "but I'm not crazy enough to get myself into the spot you're in, and with a million dollars in your lap. Take it or leave it; you're going to part with your Pueblo Oil stock and do it nicely, at my price, or go to jail for a killing. Take your choice."

Ray started to protest. Then he noticed that Bobbie had left the room.

"Where's that girl?" Jeff screamed. "Miss Ray," he yelled, "you'd better get back here, and don't try to telephone anybody."

Bobbie came from the other room.

"I had to go in there," she said. Jeff shrugged. She favored Ray with a reassuring look.

Some of his bravado returned.

"What makes you such a wonder, Mr. Cash Gorman?" Ray asked.

Jeff sensed the change and decided he had twenty minutes to put Ray in his hand. For Steele would, at this moment, be on his way. Jeff also reasoned that, since this would be the showdown meeting, when actual money would transfer, Steele would come with nothing more than a Luger automatic for protection. It was time to play the trump card.

"You killed Nada," said Jeff, as if he were saying, "Will you have a highball?"

Ray squirmed.

"Not only did you kill her, but you were observed"—Jeff guessed that he'd done the job in full sight of Bobbie—"and those who saw you do it will not share your guilt—not if they can get out. I can show them how. So it's talk with me, and do business, or take the death chamber, or chair!"

"You seem to have everything worked out," sneered Ray.

"Yes, I have," said Jeff. "You see, your first mistake was in believing there was no helium down there in your property. I took you at your word that there was, and have since discovered that your swindle had a basis in fact. Therefore, I shall profit by your foolishness. That's no more than right, is it?"

"I don't know what you are talking about," said Ray.

Some of Ray's bravado was fading. Jeff recalled to him the incident of his cigarette case that looked like a camera.

"You were right," Jeff said. "It was a camera. In fact, it took a picture of you and of your sister. I regret that it discovered your sister is not your sister."

"That's a lie," shrieked Ray. "What are you trying to pull off?"

"I know all about your racket," said Jeff. "In fact, I've collected all your prominent victims and have obtained statements from them all. And it won't do Steele or you any good to bump me off. All this knowledge is in the safe hands of a third party with instructions to open it in case I am not back and in good health in one hour!"

Ray started to get hysterical.

"Calm yourself," said Jeff. "All I want is to get hold of that stock you boys are holding. And I want it at three dollars below the market price!"

"You're a swindler," said Ray. "I told Steele you were."

"Now that you admit the racket, we can talk business."

The door opened and Steele burst into the room.

"Put up your hands, Mr. Cash Gorman," he barked.

Jeff's back was to the door. "You will find that you have company, Mr. Masterson," said Jeff, turning. His poise was reassured by Jimmy Ranger, standing in the doorway behind Steele, nee Masterson. For Jeff knew that Steele's name was that of the missing stockholder supplied him by the bank.

"Drop that gun," ordered Jimmy Ranger, shoving his automatic into Steele's back.

"Now," said Jeff, "we can get down to business. Firearms in profusion interfere with my process of thinking. You're in the bag, Mr. Masterson, or Steele—which do you prefer? But no mind. Jail is staring you in the face. And don't make any false motions, for my assistant, Mr. Ranger, is very impetuous."

"What do you want?" Steele asked. His wide, hypnotic eyes never blinked.

"You still own five thousand shares of Pueblo Oil," said Jeff. "Yesterday it was printed paper. Today it's worth something. I want it. I want the stock that Ray has left, even that which is his in name only—or is there a real Mr. Mitchell, too? The important thing, though, is that I want the stock at four dollars a share and not the forty dollars I promised to pay for it. And you have no choice but to sell it!"

Steele smiled. The man looked like a wolf without even trying. "I'd be a fool to sell out to you," he said. "That stock will be worth a fortune when the announcement is made that helium is on the property and British interests want it."

"You overlook two small items," Jeff said. "First, if you don't meet my terms, you go to jail. Second, I can exercise my option on George Ray's stock—it will cost me more, but it will be worth it because that will give me complete control of the company. I can put in my own directors and that would permit several things. Withholding development of the field, for instance, or, even better, selling the land in the Ladrones to the British interests for a nominal sum. Of course, I would have an interest in the new British company."

"What do you mean—you'll have control of the stock?" Steele demanded. "All you have is an option to purchase Ray's holdings."

"No, no; I've got options on Leeds', Harkins' and Bell's stock, also," Jeff said. He spread the proof out on the table before Steele. The big man clasped his hands and began twirling his fingers, deep in thought. Jeff had seen some cold-blooded and ruthless-looking people in his time, but he decided that Steele surpassed them all.

Finally, the man spoke again: "The shares I hold should rise to around two hundred thousand dollars, which is worth going to jail a few years for." He held up a hand to silence Jeff. "You must think I'm a fool. The minority stockholder would take you to court and prevent you from either withholding the development of that property or selling it at [illegible] nominal price. Among the minority stockholders is Phineas T. Gardiner, a very powerful man. I notice you have no options from him, and if you carry out your threat I will tell him what is going on."

Jeff shrugged. "O. K., you called it," he said, getting up. "Jail it is."

Steele laughed metallically. "Sit down," he directed sardonically. "You rather fancy yourself as being clever, but you don't have any monopoly on brains. When you were in diapers I was making fortunes. I have two pieces of paper —not with me—which are very incriminating, Mr. Gorman. Receipts for munitions sold to a foreign government." Sarcasm dripped from his voice as he added: "Or possibly you are not aware that it is illegal to export arms from the United States to China. The government would, I don't doubt, be interested in those two pieces of paper."

Jeff sat down abruptly. "How the devil did you get them?"

"Never mind that," Steele said. "I have them."

Jeff spoke to Jimmy Ranger: "Go over to the room and check that, Jimmy."

Jeff almost let the cat out of the bag by coming close to a grin when he saw the bewildered expression on Roberta's face as they sat in silence awaiting Jimmy's return, Steele looking like a wolf contemplating a sheep's den.

"He's got 'em," Jimmy reported. "Anyway, they aren't there."

Jeff arose and shrugged his shoulder good-naturedly. "All right," he said. "You don't go to jail and you keep your five thousand shares—and I have to pay George the full price for his. I don't enjoy making money for you, but I guess there's enough to go around."

Steele laughed again. "Stop jumping up and down," he said. "I'm not through. We're reasonable men. Let's get together. After all, we're both out after the same thing. I'll tell you what I'll do: I'll give you two hundred thousand dollars for your options and return those two small pieces of paper to you."

Jeff scowled at him. "They're worth a million and a half bucks as soon as the news gets out."

Steele's tone was contemptuous. "I'm not asking what they are worth. I'm telling you what I'll give you for them. After all, you've only put out about—let's see, forty-five thousand dollars. A nice little profit and you're a free man."

"We could both go to jail," Jeff said. "Did you ever think of that?"

"The difference is that I wouldn't mind it too much if it were profitable," Steele said. He enjoyed wielding the whip. "I'm old enough to be able to accept such a matter philosophically. You wouldn't like it at all, I'm sure. In addition, heavy fines would be imposed on you. Really, it would be very unprofitable from your standpoint."

Jeff took a turn around the room. "All right," he said finally. "It's a deal."

Steele waved toward the door. "Send your bodyguard out."

Jeff was taken by surprise at that. "Why?"

Steele got up. "I'll let him have my gun and George's, too. There's something I want to discuss privately."

"Take the guns and go on outside, Jimmy," Jeff commanded. "Now what?"

Steele locked the door behind Ranger and went to a topcoat which he had brought with him. "I thought our conversation might take a turn like this," he remarked with the studied casualness of a man showing off his superior wit. "Here is your money—two hundred thousand dollars in government bonds. Make the options over to me. George and Roberta can witness it."

Jeff thumbed through the bonds. "You sure these aren't hot?"

"I don't deal in anything so crude," Steele said. "My plans have finesse."

"O. K.," Jeff said.

"It's been a pleasure to meet you, Mr. Gorman," Steele smirked as he opened the door for Jeff. "You proved even more profitable than I first anticipated. We must look each other up again sometime."

"Oh, I'm sure we'll see more of each other," Jeff said. "By the way, we'll just keep these guns. The way you play makes me nervous when I think of myself with two hundred thousand dollars in bonds and you with a gun."

Steele laughed. "By all means, keep the guns as a little souvenir of our happy experience together."

Ranger looked at Jeff sourly as they went down the hall. "He paid you off?"

Jeff nodded.

"You gonna let 'em get away with that murder?" he asked. Jeff looked at the grim set to Jimmy's jaw and smiled faintly. "No," he replied. "Nada was a pretty good sort, all things considered. And I just don't like killers on general principles."

He looked over his shoulder to see if he was being watched and then rapped on a partially open door near the elevator end of the corridor. A bald head and owlish face appeared. "Hello, Mr. Gorman. How is it?"

"All right, inspector," Jeff said. "We even brought you their guns. If you want to make the arrest now—O. K. I settled my private business. Please remember to protect the girl and treat her nicely. I'll be down to see her a little later. Tell her, will you?"

The police official grinned. "You bet," he replied. "And nice work, Mr. Gorman! Come on, boys."

Jeff walked to the elevator in silence.

"Come on," Ranger finally said. "Give."

"Bobbie told me what happened," Jeff said. "I planted those munitions receipts with her and talked her into turning State's evidence. Then I made a deal with the D. A. Ray killed Nada, of course. He forced Bobbie to call you and then went out on the fire escape and waited for me to come along with the law right behind me. Steele worked him up to it."

"They'll accuse Steele as an accessory?" Jimmy asked.

Jeff nodded and sighed.

"You like that girl, don't you?" Jimmy said sympathetically.

Jeff nodded. "Stage-struck. Out in Hollywood. Broke. No work. Steele—or Masterson, his real name—comes along and offers her a legitimate job, and the first thing she knows she's up to her neck in shady stuff. You know how that goes."

"What'll she get?" Ranger asked.

"Nothing as far as a sentence goes," Jeff replied. "She was tricked into the room and forced to make the phone call at gun point. She had nothing to do with the murder. Of course, the publicity will be terrible."

"How about the swindling end?" Ranger asked. "If you have to testify, how are you going to explain this last piece of business."

"The murder charge comes first," Jeff pointed out, "and they hang them here for murder, so any mention of financial transactions will have to do only with their bearing on the murder."

Jimmy nodded doubtfully. "Still, the basis of this little two-hundred-thousand-dollar deal won't sound so good on the witness stand if it's brought up," he said. "You came pretty close to doing a little swindling there yourself."

Jeff laughed. "Can I help it if Steele forces me to take his money? Which reminds me I must call Mr. Gardiner and tell him the boat sailed, just now. He'll be glad to know I lost him some money."

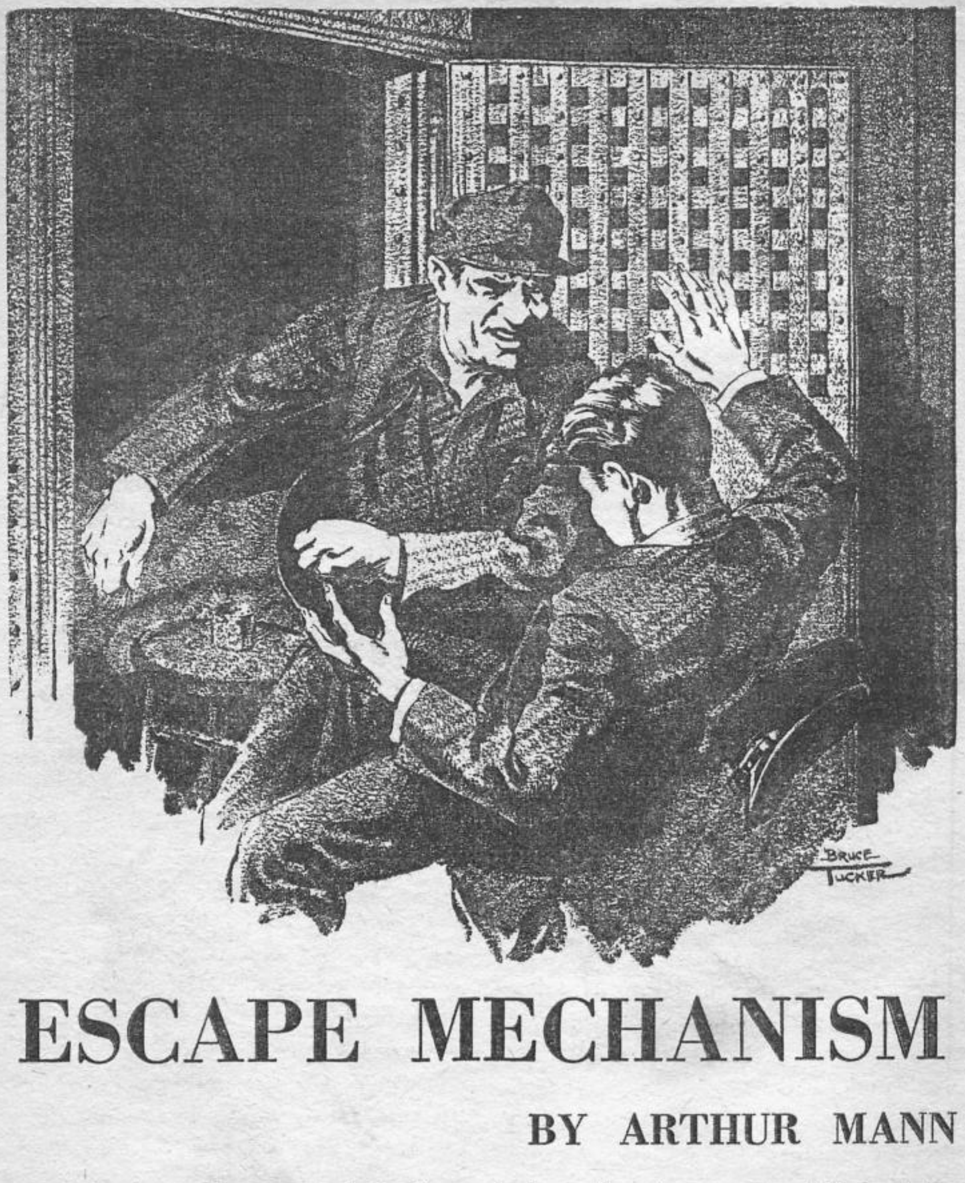
"Glad?" asked Jimmy, puzzled.

"Certainly. The next time, he'll listen to Jeff Gorman!"

"Will there be a next time?"

"It begins right now with this phone call," smiled Jeff, walking directly to the telephone after opening the door of his room.

THE END.



ESCAPE MECHANISM

BY ARTHUR MANN

● The invention worked O. K. up to a certain point; then . . .

"ELECTRIC" is the word to describe the atmosphere that prevailed within the offices of Ace Promotions, Inc., due largely to the rapid floor pacing executed by Joe Feder, executive president. But "worried" is not the word to describe the look on the cigar-punctured face of Joe Feder. His expression was one of acute horror, like that of a doomed man.

He walked with the staccato stride of the emotionally unstable type and identified himself as such an instant later by charging furiously at the young girl typing at the reception desk.

"Sophie!" he exclaimed. "Get my brother Jake on the wire!"

Startled, the girl gasped, brushed back a nonexistence wisp of coal-black hair and wagged her pretty face from side to side.

"He's at the court, Mr. Feder," she said, and emphasized the words with a wave of a hand that looked as though the finger ends had been dipped in a bucket of blood. "I told you. City court."

"City court!" Feder moaned. He slapped a thin hand against his corrugated brow. "Suin' somebody—sixteen bucks fifty for lacerations an' shock—when he should be here attendin' to personally a million-dollar deal."

"He said the case was for cash," Sophie said simply.

"What about the contracts?"

"They're all ready. He'll be up soon, because his was the first case on the calendar."

"It was the first case for the last three days!" Feder shouted. "A city court has no calendar. They pick the cases by punchboard!"

He resumed the striding and a plume of smoke trailed from the cigar. He circled his own office, came out and entered the office marked "Conference," which was used for receptions to propositions and periodic rows with his hesitant brother, Jacob, who insisted upon living life by rote. These two rooms, plus the tiny reception space, which contained drinking water, filing cabinets, a small supply of stationery and a sofa of love-seat size, comprised the tangible assets of Ace Promotions, Inc. All except the stationery, it might be added, came with the office.

But the intangibles were being carried to and fro within the cerebellum of Joe Feder, and the rest were out in the world, crying to be discovered. For be it known that Joe Feder had dedicated his life to the solemn task of making a discovery and parlaying it into a million dollars net. There had been disappointments. There would be others. But not this time.

"Hauser!" Feder exclaimed. "Sophie, see if you can get Hauser!"

"I did," Sophie replied, gesturing emptily again. "Don't you remember? He left his laboratory."

"Probably got lost," Feder muttered. "Inventors always do, especially on the most important day of their lives—"

"This iss Egon Hauser talking . . . taking to you on a wafe len't' what doessn't belong to him. . . . Egon Hauser iss walking up the street. He is entering your building. . . . He is waiting for the elevator—"

"Hauser!" Joe Feder called. "Where are you?"

Sophie was laughing and pointing to the filing cabinet, but Joe Feder was too excited to see. He was almost too upset to hear.

"I am in the elevator now, zoombing to the tent' floor. . . . Here ve are. . . . The elevator is oud, ant I am coming to the office of Ace Bromotions. . . . I am at the door—"

Joe Feder dived and opened the door. His thin face was alive with the joy of success. He tossed the cigar to the floor and hauled a slight, sandy-haired figure into the office.

"Hauser, you almost killed me!" Joe exclaimed. "Where's the receiver—I mean, the talker thing—"

"I put in the filing cabinet last night the receiver—so," Hauser said, and produced a small wooden box from the cabinet. "It pluks into a wall socket. But den—"

His blue eyes lighted devilishly as he

reached into his vest pocket and pulled out a metal case no larger than a cigarette lighter.

"This iss the business part," he whispered. He pulled it back. "No, no! It's set just right. Ve are ready for the show. Vare iss the lawyer-treasurer, Jacob, and ven do ve go to the prison?"

"He'll be right up," Feder said, fondling the receiving part of the apparatus. "I can't believe it, Hauser, even though I've heard it. Imagine that, walkin' around the street with a broadcastin' set no bigger'n a cigarette lighter!"

"But I can't eat it!" Hauser reminded sternly. "Ant the sooner you bromote it into some money, I vouldn't mind."

"Don't worry, Hauser," Feder whispered and patted the receiver. "With this on the market, you'll never go hungry again."

"Ant maybe your brother should stick around here more to sign checks ven they're needed," Hauser added. "It vould serve you both right if I fainted during the demonstration!"

THERE was considerable bickering as the three, the Feder brothers and Hauser, sped toward the Eastview Prison in a sixteen-cylinder hired job. As watchdog of the treasury, which came out of his personal bank roll, Jake thought a train would have served as well, and he was positive it was cheaper. He was not a stingy man, but he saw no wisdom in spending ten where one would accomplish as much. And it did not cost four dollars an hour (with chauffeur) to ride on a train.

"Stop your cryin', Jake," Joe Feder pleaded. "An' take that look off your puss as though you smelled somethin' bad. You can't win all them bump-an'-bruise cases. Well, after today, you'll never have t' share a busted gam with anybody."

"It's not the case," Jake murmured, and shifted his slight frame in the deep-cushioned seat. "I'm cautious. Look, Hauser, you've *got* to get a patent on this thing. If you can discover it, anybody else can."

"I'm laughing!" Hauser said, and proved it with a guffaw. "Vile I know it alone, nobody steals it, ant it couldn't happen twice in an age, the accident like it happened to me when I discovered my new tube."

"Let the guy alone, Jake," said Joe. "We got him insured an' his will leaves us the works. That's better'n a patent."

Jake still believed otherwise. The law books said it should be done differently. Here was a man with an important discovery with which he refused to trust even the patent office. Suppose the thing were already patented— Jake slumped back in his seat with the groan of a sick man.

REACHING the Eastview Prison, Joe Feder attained an apex in promotional flight, taking off in the offices of Warden Lewis. The warden was not a skeptical man, but he did entertain doubts as to any invention matching Feder's claims in his last letter. That was why he had invited Commissioner Healy, purse-string puller for the institution.

"I'm glad you asked the commissioner to the party," Joe said after introductions had made all known to each other. "I wish you had invited the governor, because our little gadget, Warden Lewis, will revolutionate prison reform."

"That is what we seek," the warden replied. "We seek more freedom, a greater exercise of will and—"

"And muscles," Joe finished. "Especially muscle, warden, because it was exercisin' will that got 'em in this clink, which is not bad, accordin' to what I've heard about some other joints."

"We're not perfect, Mr. Feder," Lewis confessed. "And now, you said something about releasing a prisoner. I'm afraid—"

"Well, you needn't be, 'cause our little gadget is bulletproof. I mean, it's foolproof. We want you to spring the toughest mug you got in the academy."

"That's Meanie Malloy!" Commissioner Healy exclaimed. "You couldn't possibly let that man loose!"

"With our system, commissioner," Joe Feder shouted, "he's not loose. Stone bars do not a prison make, but our little gadget is as much of a prison as you got here. He's right with you all the time, talkin' to you, tellin' you where he is, an' he don't know it. It's just one long confession!"

Both Hauser and Jake Feder nodded in agreement, but the warden and commissioner exchanged glances of doubt. Joe Feder, realizing that Ace Promotions and the future thereof was losing ground, pulled himself together for a blitzargument.

"Meanie Malloy!" Joe exclaimed. "Bring him here, and give me an opportunity to demonstrate the efficacity of our invention. Turn him over into our custody under bond—*any* bond; ten, fifty, a *hundred* thousand bucks—an' if he gets out of our protective custody, warden, the dough is yours!"

At this point Jake Feder's complexion took on the color of new grass. He swallowed an Adam's apple that bobbed up and down like a cork in a squall. Fortunately for Jake's financial future, the warden declined the offer of a bond.

"Money can't take the place of Meanie Malloy," Warden Lewis said. "Money can't repair the damage he has done to society. He will be a menace till the day he dies."

"And probably after," the commissioner added.

But Joe Feder wanted the best of proof in behalf of Ace Promotions and the product at stake. And here was the opportunity. A sale to Eastview Prison would mean an opening wedge to sales throughout the State, and then the nation and finally the world. Every prison would make the tiny broadcasting unit a necessary part of prison equipment. It would cut the cost of guards in half. It would provide a check on all prisoners, but especially the tough ones. It was, in short—and Joe Feder proclaimed the fact—the greatest boon to prisons since crime was invented. And that seemed to clinch things, because Warden Lewis weakened on the Malloy request.

"Just what do you propose to do?" the warden asked. "I mean, how do you intend going about it? Suppose I bring Meanie Malloy up here, I've got to have some assurance of the procedure. Mind you, I am attracted by your invention and its possibilities, but I had thought we might demonstrate among us."

"Nonsense!" Joe Feder scoffed. "What can we prove among us? It would be exclusive. But bring Malloy here for five minutes. Let us go to his cell an' leave the rest to Ace Promotions."

"What happens to Malloy after he returns to his cell?" asked Commissioner Healy.

"Leave that to our gadget, an' from it you will get all the information. Malloy will sing an' he won't know a thing about it!"

That angle of the situation appealed tremendously to the forward-looking prison official, who felt that the entire penal system was hampered by the shell of protective silence or lies with which the criminal surrounds himself. To hear a desperate character speak his mind freely was to know that man, though the warden had no scheme for further indictment of a wretch by using against him what had been gained by eavesdropping.

JOE FEDER'S purpose in the matter was to sell the midget broadcasting device far and wide for a neat little profit. He had no idea of trying to understand a crook as anything but what the district attorney had called him. In fact, Joe Feder had an idea that the little broadcasting gadget would unravel many a crime crying for a solution.

"Meanie Malloy," he said with the authority of a crystal gazer, "would solve at least one crime every night just by talkin' in his sleep!"

"Very well," Warden Lewis said, slapping his desk. "We'll try it on Meanie Malloy. What's the procedure?"

"Simple," Joe Feder replied, and beckoned Egon Hauser to the desk with the package containing the receiving set. "You take it over from here, Egon."

"In my hant, warden," Hauser began, pointing to the little box which he held, "iss the smallest and tiniest radio set ever made, except that this one woiks. We admit the receiver is not so novel. It has a plate antenna, instead of wire, which iss made possible by my new tube—"

"You have a patent on all this?" Commissioner Healy asked.

Egon wagged his blond head and grinned. "Only on my tube, which is the secret of the whole thing. It is a tiny tube, made powerful by the addition of another pole—four instead of three—blus the use of a special alloy, which I discover by accident. The power of the tube, ant using the brinciple in the tuning apparatus, you got millions of wafe len't's—"

"Good heavens!" Warden Lewis exclaimed. "We could assign a wave length to a prisoner—instead of a number!"

"I could've explained all that by letter," Joe Feder added, "but I didn't want to use up all y' time."

"Proceed, Mr. Hauser."

"That's all, except to show it woiks. You take my little set ant keep it tuned like so," the inventor said. "We take this." He produced the tiny broadcasting unit. "Ant while Malloy iss here, we go down ant do a little *schmuzzling* arount in his cell."

"And that little . . . little match box is it!" the warden gasped.

"That little cigarette lighter," Joe Feder laughed, "tells the story. All you have to do is sit by the box."

It was, indeed, astonishing, almost incomprehensible, that the delicate radio mechanism could be squeezed into such a tiny space. It opened up numberless avenues for usage, and Warden Lewis congratulated the president of Ace Promotions for his acumen and Egon Hauser for his ingenuity. Jake Feder stood in the corner, doubting that his brother's itinerant mind could be a success at anything, regardless of a product's merit.

Warden Lewis set the prison staff in motion for the experiment. He assigned a trusty to Joe Feder and Hauser for the demonstration.

"Just do as they say," the warden instructed.

And that was the way Joe Feder wanted it. He liked freedom for expression, especially of ideas, and he followed the trusty through the tiers of air-conditioned rooms and then to the outer doors of the prison, where Feder instructed each guard in what to do when the emergency arose. And the emergency was Meanie Malloy loose.

"Malloy?" exclaimed one guard. "I'll shoot him on sight, if he's makin' a break."

"Do it an' you're a dead duck!" Feder exclaimed. "Malloy will be better protected than if you screws are watchin' him. Do as I say, because that's the warden's orders."

It was O. K. with the guard, and it had to be, for Joe Feder was not one to weaken, once an offensive was in sight of the goal. He proceeded through the prison, repeating the instructions about not molesting Meanie Malloy, and at each point he was received with open-mouthed amazement, but all agreed to co-operate.

MEANIE MALLOY was his old defiant self when brought before Warden Lewis. His bushy brows were mashed down into a scowl and his heavy jaw was twisted to curl an undershot lip. He hiked his trousers with a movement of his elbows and said:

"I don't know a thing, an' if I did, I wouldn't stool!"

"Nobody's asking you to stool, Malloy," Lewis said sternly. "I wanted you to meet Commissioner Healy—and the commissioner wanted to meet you."

Malloy sneered even more. He hiked the pants again and nodded his close-shaven head toward the cringing figure of Jake Feder, who had selected the farthest point possible.

"If that's the lawyer fer Consolidated Mayhem, I ain't sayin' th' right time."

"He is a lawyer," the warden said, "but not for the Mayhem gang. That's Mr. Jacob Feder—"

"He looks like somethin' fished outa quicklime, but not soon enough!" And Malloy enjoyed a hearty guffaw at Jake's expense.

"All right," the warden said, with a nod to the two keepers, "take him back to his cell."

As the door closed behind the incorrigible, Lewis shook his head doubtfully. "I . . . I don't know. It *may* work, but then—"

Jake Feder was about to plea for a postponement, when Joe and Hauser burst into the office. Joe was rubbing his hands with delight.

"It's done!" he exclaimed. "Now, all we got to do is sit here an' listen to the greatest bit of magic ever performed on the level."

"He's a dangerous character," Warden Lewis sighed.

"So is electricity," Joe Feder countered. "It kills people, but not while it's under control. Malloy's under control—listen!"

The sound of footsteps came over the little receiving set. And then Malloy's snarling voice.

"Keep y' paws off me person!"

"Git in there, else I'll bash ya!" replied the guard.

A noise followed, indicating that Meanie Malloy had been shoved. Then came cursing, proving that he had been shoved. A silence followed, and then:

"Ps-s-st! Hey, Louie!"

Lewis said: "That's Malloy's next cellmate."

"Y' don't have t' whisper, warden," Joe Feder laughed. "He can't hear us. Ain't it great?"

"Yes—"

"Louie, dat screw lef' me cell door open!"

Warden Lewis exclaimed. Feder consoled him and said, "Quiet!"

"Well"—Malloy's voice laughed softly—"there's no harm in puttin' me coat on an' takin' another stroll, hey, Louie?"

Louie's reply wasn't clear, because a sound like static interfered. But it wasn't static, Joe Feder explained.

"The set's staticproof. The noise comes from Malloy puttin' on his coat. I fixed it in the linin' of th' garment. Now listen!"

The incorrigible's footsteps sounded as he left his cell. They heard the clank of the closing door. Silence. Then voices, first Malloy's insulting a guard, and the guard's struggle against bashing the guy's head in.

"Wait," said Warden Lewis. "That guard . . . it's Henstrom . . . he shouldn't pass Henstrom. It leads to the side yard—"

But Malloy had already passed Henstrom!

"Let him go, warden!" Joe Feder pleaded. "We got him covered, doncha see? We know exactly where he is!"

"It's woiking better as I expected!" Hauser exclaimed.

Then over the speaker:

"Get back, screw! Put that aside, else I'll cutcha t' ribbons. Gimme that rod—"

"Malloy, you'll get killed! Oh!"

There followed a thudding sound, and then footsteps, rapid ones, as Malloy made the break.

"Good heavens!" Commissioner Healy shouted. "He's making a break!"

"We got him covered, haven't we?" Joe Feder screamed. "What's all the excitement for?"

"Malloy with a gun!" Warden Lewis gasped. "That's too much excitement, Feder. I've got to sound the alarm!"

"Do, an' you'll spoil everything!" Joe threatened. "Wait—he's talkin' again! Listen!"

And over the speaker again:

"Get outa that bus, mug! Get out!"

"But I'm waitin' for Mr. Feder an' his party—"

Another wallop was broadcast. Then the starting of the car, the roar of a sixteen-cylinder engine, and then the sound of Jake Feder's limp body collapsing in the corner of the office.

"The car!" Joe Feder exclaimed. "The no-good crook's stole our car. But we still got him broadcastin'—"

WARDEN LEWIS had sounded the escape signal, and the vicinity was roaring from the din of sirens. Within a half-minute every alarm in the prison was going full blast.

Yet the stout little broadcasting unit was challenging the sirens, because Meanie Malloy's voice came over the speaker loud and clear as he extolled his newfound freedom in song:

"Oh, if I had the wings of an angel-l-l-l
Over these preeson walls I would fly-y-y-y-y."

"He has a goot raddio voice," Egon Hauser shouted. "Listen the way he sings!"

"Oh, good heavens!" Warden Lewis moaned. "What will the governor say?"

"What will he say?" Joe Feder exclaimed. "What will he say when we let him listen to Meanie Malloy broadcastin' an' tellin' us where he is for the next few hours. I tell ya, warden, this is like a miracle. Listen!"

Over the loud-speaker:

"Fill it up, buddy," Malloy ordered of a gas-station attendant. "An' don't try t' cheat me. Which way to the State road?"

"Two miles after the fork."

"That lead over to Kingsberry?"

"Yeah, an' look, Meanie," the attendant whispered. "You better take that coat off before a trooper sees it. I'll getcha another."

Joe Feder wailed a protest: "No, no! Meanie, don't take off that coat—a fortune depends on it. No, no!"

"I don't think he can hear you, Feder!" Warden Lewis said with great sarcasm. "Quick, what's the license of the car?"

Joe Feder wagged his head wearily, and then practically swooned as a loud noise indicated that the coat had been removed and tossed into the woods. But the stout little broadcasting unit sent over the pur of the departing motor and the dying strains of Meanie Malloy's lengthy rendition of "The Prisoner's Song."

THREE dejected pioneers wedged into a train seat for the ride back to town, and it was Jake Feder's moment of triumph.

"This is the way we should be coming up," he muttered bitterly. "Instead of lettin' you put the dog on us."

"So what?" Joe Feder replied. "The experiment worked. The set's a success. Hauser, let me be the first to congratulate you!"

Hauser took the proffered hand and grinned. "Denks, but I would radder have back the little raddio. It took me five years to build it—"

"Five years?" Joe echoed. A look of pain passed over his countenance. "Do you mean to say it'll take you five more years—"

"Ten, maybe," Hauser said with a shrug. "What with the war, I don't know if I can import my alloy for the fourt' pole in the audion tube. If I don't have that—"

"All right, Hauser!" Joe groaned. "Here, Jake, sit up an' cut out that faintin'." He turned and gripped Hauser's arm. "Egon! What did you do with that disk you showed me?"

"You mean the movie film?"

"Yes!"

"I got it. Vy?"

"Bring it into the office tomorrow. We'll find a market for the film. That'll tide us over till you can get another radio set put together. Boy, oh, boy! We'll pyramid the thing an' chase every film maker right outa the business. Hauser, you're a genius!"

THE END.

You need more than a track and horses to open a mutuel horse-racing plant. Young Drake discovers the "extras" when he falls heir to a contract to complete a track. Vested interests decide an unfinished plant will be more healthy—physically and financially—for Drake. It is a ten-thousand-to-one shot that the interests will win until Cash Gorman learns the details. Cash steps in and Nick Lias swings from the floor in every round. Cash is overmatched in this adventure in money making . . . "Million Dollar Mutuel" . . . until he goes broke. Then he finds hay-makers which will thrill, panic and entertain you through a full-length novel in the next issue of The Wizard.

RACES & ROMANCE

BY CARL HENRY

• Delong had the sucker almost on the beach when Jerome cut the line.

THERE WERE certain things about the character of Vincent Delong which would have shocked many of his cohorts speechless. To say that in certain things Delong was decidedly old-fashioned, even puritanical, would be an overstatement. But he was somewhat on the finicky side when it came to business. And Delong had a habit, annoying to his associates, of tending strictly to business when there was no business, and letting things run their course when things were humming.

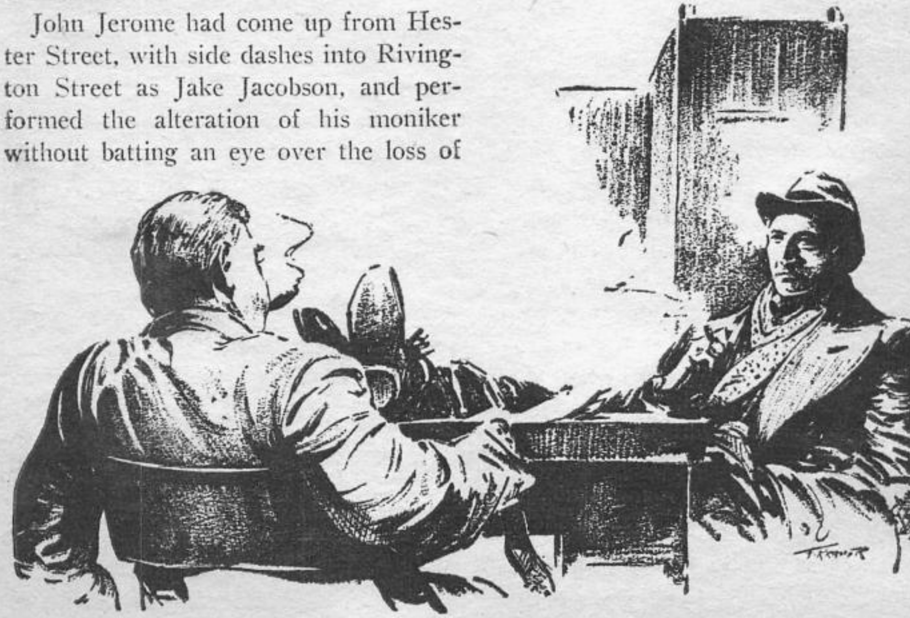
"Anybody can make dough when it's like turning on a water tap," he snapped at John Jerome, his irritating partner of the moment.

John Jerome had come up from Hester Street, with side dashes into Rivington Street as Jake Jacobson, and performed the alteration of his moniker without batting an eye over the loss of the syllable. Since Jake's father, a herring mangler whose fortune had been routed to his bank account the hard way, was generally an ever-ready touch for the means to a fresh start in life, there were diversions of tremendous distraction when money ceased to roll in.

It was such a circumstance that found John Jerome briskly waltzing into the offices of G. V. Delong Associates just as the clock in the richly appointed space occupied by the partners chimed twelve.

"Listen, Jake," snapped Delong, "a good pickpocket has done his work, suffered his daily pinch and is on the way to greener fields in Jersey by this time of day!"

"Anybody ever squawk when you breeze in here at four o'clock in the afternoon?" replied Jerome.



"No," said Delong, "and for a good reason; I generally come in to sign checks. Checks made good by suckers such as yourself when I took you into this deal as a partner. You've been sheared, sucker, and I could move you out of here, bag and baggage—"

"Except that my old man might toss you in the clink for fraud," said Jerome.

"Except that I like your old man and I think he got all the tough breaks one life allows when you were wished on him as a son. Get this straight, and let it sink in. I don't have to keep you in this new set-up. I'm after fresh dough. Unfortunately, I've got you in for the picture you provide with H. Smithtown Simperson, or whatever his name is, but I can toss him, and you behind him, right out of the chance of making a fortune in Caribbean Products, Inc."

"Give that sales conversation to H. Wellington Simpson," replied Jerome. "I brought him here, and besides, I came here on a sales conversation something like that."

"The one that sends you out will be shorter," replied Delong. But Jerome was busy dialing a number on the private wire run into the office of the partners and unconnected with the switchboard—the switchboard that was quite ineffective, since the telephone company demanded certain obligations to be met with overdue bills which included calls to the available contacts in the West Indies and a list of long-distance connections which would frighten even a Hollywood picture director looking for a star.

"Get the hell off the only phone I can use," ordered Delong. "You'll go hungry if I can't use a telephone to contact money."

Jerome was unmindful of the order. He got his number and called a cheerful hello and then a request for a check. He listened intently and put down a figure on a scratch pad he had before him. Delong's straight mouth and flashing gray eyes tensed at the same time. He pulled at his closely cropped full mustache.

"O. K., Pete," said Jerome into the phone. "Take a couple. A ten-dollar parlay on Dark Beau and Blacky Bee at Suffolk and twenty and twenty on Dark Beau to win. Also bet me ten on Gayle F in the first at Belmont. Nope, can't make it. Get the second. Call you tomorrow."

Jerome hung up the phone. He struck a match on a book of them and lighted a cigarette which he had carefully extracted and put in his mouth.

"Hm-m-m," mused Delong, "you bet sixty-seventy bucks on those goats, get in here at noon, and now, I suppose, you're going to lunch with the Countess de Something-or-other while me"—he was roaring now—"me, I can't get enough dough out of this joint for a container of coffee."

"No?" said Jerome, with irritating nonchalance. "Here's a dime for the call; get yourself some."

He was gone before Delong could answer. Delong pressed a button on his desk. A pert-appearing secretary, Miss Beston, came in.

"Miss Beston"—Delong always was very formal in the office with his employees—"there's something got to be done at once about Mr. Jerome."

"What would you suggest, Mr. Delong?" the girl asked.

"Shooting him," replied Delong, "but he's in this play until we find out whether Mr. Buckingham Palace—"

"Mr. Simpson," the girl interrupted.

"Yeah," Delong went on, "that's right, Simpson. Must remember his name if we can heat him up. But I'm having trouble doing that."

"I've never known you to have trouble in such situations before, Mr. Delong, except for one thing," said the girl, turning on her heel and going back to her desk. Delong could see her through the small corridor which led from the office of the partners to the outside room. The girl took her handbag from the bottom drawer of the desk and came back into Delong's office.

"It's always difficult for you to operate on an empty stomach," she said, "and while I know you can manage your eating at night without difficulty, it must be troublesome going into places in daylight."

Delong smiled as he took a five-dollar bill from the girl.

"Remind me to buy you champagne the next time I take you to dinner," he said, stuffing the bill in his pocket. "Strange thing. Fellows like me meet very few headwaiters they know in the daylight. Makes it a long time between meals."

"Especially," she said, "when you are accustomed to daylight eating."

"O.K.," he said, "get some food up here. This . . . er . . . Mr. Simple Simon, or whatever his name is, is due here at one o'clock. I've got to be here when he gets here. Have a good lunch on my desk. Pump that phone every three or four minutes. And come in during one of the phony conversations and announce that Jerome is on the other wire."

WHEN Miss Beston announced Mr. Simpson over the switchboard telephone, G. Vincent Delong was elbow-deep in food, blueprints and maps. He had papers which appeared suspiciously like tariff schedules, contracts, bonds, all manner of things, in front of him.

"How are you, Mr. Simpson?" he said with effusion that only an expert could detect was feigned. He came around the desk and warmly shook the hand of the visitor. "Miss Beston, will you take my lunch tray outside? And, by the way, pay the check." He tossed the lady's five-dollar bill on the tray as if he owned it. The girl took the tray and departed.

"Well, Mr. Simpson," said Delong, "I hope you are ready to make up your mind. Caribbean Products will be the hottest thing since radio when it hits the street. Only this'll stay hot."

"Really?" said Mr. Simpson, with the full suggestion of British inflection in his comment.

"Got to be. Think of all the things which we must get from Europe. Take Scotch alone. Can't be sure to get that much longer. Scotch and British too busy with other things. So what's to take its place. Rum from the West Indies!"

"But I thought this was for the importation of nonalcoholic products."

"You're right, to begin with, but I'm just pointing out what possibilities there are ahead. Now, this perfume deal is the most perfect set-up in the world. I've got schedules here that show how foolproof it is. We can take any number of the world's best perfumes into certain ports down there which are considered free ports and bring them through certain free ports in New York—there are two of them, you know—and there'll be no taxes as far as we are concerned. Moreover, we can undersell and offer better inducements than any firm now operating in America."

The thought occurred to Mr. Simpson that, if this scheme for tax evasion—legal tax evasion—was so good, why hadn't some of the great perfumeries of the world figured it out? Mr. Delong had that one answered. There were only two remote ports of the West Indies that were free ports. These were in American possessions. Since the great perfumeries were mostly foreign-owned, obviously they couldn't be imported to such a port as St. Thomas by the company, for that would be evading the law. But they could be imported by a resident of the once Danish-owned island. Mr. Delong had such a man, one of the majority stockholders of the Caribbean Products, Inc.

Money was really not an essential item. It was required to get things moving. Jerome that very moment was down South conferring with an importer of rum to share shipments with him to bring in the scented millions in bulk. The telephone rang.

"Excuse me," said Delong. He lifted the receiver and barked into the instrument: "Yes. Yes. Put him on." He paused. "How are you, Mr. Nolan? Yes. Yes, that's right. I'm afraid you are too late; we have several men interested." He paused as if listening. "That's right," he interspersed occasionally. Miss Beston opened the door. Delong covered the phone with his free hand.

"Mr. Jerome is on the other phone," she said flatly.

"Just a minute, Mr. Nolan," Delong said. "Yes. Yes, I know. So is he on long distance. But you want an answer. This may be your chance of getting one. Hold on."

Delong punched the telephone buttons on his desk.

"Hello, John," he said pleasantly, though the thought of being pleasant to Jerome made him see a sunburst. "How are you?" Again he paused. "Fine. Fine," he said into the dead phone. "O. K., Nolan is on the other phone. I'll tell him it's O. K. We'll take the whole boat, then. That means we'll save at least five percent on rates. That in itself will give us an edge. O. K. Hold on."

Again he punched the buttons on his desk.

"It's O. K., Nolan," said Delong into the still-dead phone. "It's closed. You can have half the load. We'll split the other half with Bates. Rum, reed and romance. Good combination. See you soon. . . . Day after tomorrow? That's fine. 'By." He punched the telephone buttons again. "Right, John. It's a deal. We're in!"

He hung up the telephone and turned to his visitor, who was quite aghast at the manipulation and horrified at the idea of talking at one time on two telephones over one wire. Had he known that his host had talked only to himself he perhaps would have fainted.

"That's the end, Mr. Simpson," he said with finality. "We really do not need money now. What we want is just somebody looking to make a small fortune on a small investment of five thousand dollars to get us over this first load. I have obligated myself for the chartering of a ship, which in itself will make our first product five percent cheaper in New York than anything it is in competition with. And it makes no difference whether it is you—or who!"

You had to believe that Delong meant what he said. You'd have thought that he already had the five thousand right in his pocket, rather than the degree of flatness he'd previously revealed to his secretary.

"I think I shall want to see these contracts," said Simpson. Delong whipped around the desk and filled him with a handful of maps and schedules and his ear with a line of conversation that mystified the lazy sucker.

"I think I shall have a go at this," said Simpson. "I must pop up to Greenwich for a few days. I'll be back day after tomorrow for tea and I shall pop over here. Mr. Jerome will be here then, I hope. Perhaps, if he finds things as you say, I shall be with you."

Before Simpson could say good-by, Delong extracted a nearly empty bottle of Scotch from his desk and, mixing water, he poured a drink. He offered Simpson a toast to their splendid relations together and brushed him out of the office before he could say anything more.

"Where," said Delong to his Miss Beston, "do you suppose that fathead is?"

"No doubt he will be at Belmont," replied the girl. "He's had some remarkable luck since yours has run badly. You might find him there."

"How much dough you got? Give it to me. I'll give it back to you Thursday."

He grabbed the money offered him and stuffed it into his pocket without counting it. He then bolted for the elevator. He'd fix Jerome so he would stay in the office and tend to business with five thousand dollars' worth of sucker hanging around when he needed only two thousand to get the best deal started he'd ever heard of. This one was a sure-fire noninflammable chemical treatment. It would prove invulnerable to all sorts of fire, even incendiary bombs. But right now he required Jerome in that office for a few days to make things look good, even if they weren't.

DELONG reached the Pennsylvania Station just in time to catch the last train which would make the first race. Then he recalled that Jerome had placed several bets. He looked at Gayle F, one of the horses in the first race. This was a bet he was certain he had heard Jerome make. That would mean that Jerome would not be out at Belmont. At least, he would not be there for the first race. He tried to recall other fragments of the conversation between Jerome and his telephone bookmaker, but could not. He was too mad to recall it. Too mad to notice the small, wiry fellow who'd slipped furtively into a seat beside him.

"Boy," said the little man in a hissing whisper, "am I sore."

"Are you talking to me?" Delong asked. "If you are, I don't want any. I'm in the same business!"

"That's why I'm talking to you," said the little man. "I've got something hot today. And for the first time in my life I haven't got a sucker."

"You're telling me! Listen, chump, I've got a guy all set for a five-grand bite and my man who can chop off the piece is out to lunch!"

He said it with a "How do you like that?" tone which left no doubt of his meaning or his feeling about the predicament.

"At least, you got a bird flushed out," said the sad little man. "Me? I got my ticket and fare into the park with the first legitimate piece of information I've had in years. And nobody to give it to!"

"I don't want it. But what's the story? Let's have it. It'll pass the time on the way out."

"There ain't no story, bud," the little man said. "I ain't no tout. I'm a legitimate businessman. I deal in situations. But today the situation is perfect. I'm out at the track for the work-outs yesterday morning. Just looking for a situation."

"What is a situation?" asked Delong.

"A situation is one in which it becomes necessary for a horse to break a leg to lose a race," his companion said flatly.

"Do such situations still exist?" Delong had been long away from the track.

"They have been known to," smiled the secretive little man. "Now, here's one which couldn't be improved upon. I'm watching a pig called Bombsford work out, and for some reason I walk over to the stable a few minutes after they take him off the track. Eddie Frankie, his trainer, is looking him over after the work-out. He says to his assistant: "Joe, we'll dump this hayburner at Aqueduct tomorrow into that seventh race and we won't have to worry about him. Somebody'll be certain to claim him. He's right."

"So?" asked Delong.

"So I've got the horse. I've got the jockey. I talked with him last night. They'll be in there trying with this one in a race of cripples, and that means somebody is going to grab him, believing he's a good buy. If he isn't claimed, they'll miss their guess, but they aren't going to be able to cross up a situation they've rigged. They'll be trying with a good horse in amongst a lot of stiffs."

"Mister," said Delong, "you've given me an idea. You'll see me sometime this afternoon on the track with a citizen who looks as if he was turned out of sucker's mill. He's wearing a gray seersucker suit. When you see him with me I want you to rush up and give me the biggest hand ever. As if you were ready to die beside me. Long-lost buddies or something."

"Sucker?"

"The biggest," said Delong. "By the way, what's your name!"

"Wally."

"Wally the Wolf," said Delong, "for these purposes."

"Right," said Wally.

"What'd you say?"

"I said O. K.!"

WALLY was indeed like a long-lost friend when he found Delong talking with Jerome after the fourth race. Jerome had a very unhappy expression on his face. His horse finished second in the first and in the same slot in the second. When Wally found Delong he gave him a rush act which surprised even the man who had made the suggestion.

"Old friend of mine," he said to Jerome. "Jerome, meet Wally."

Wally favored Jerome with a nod of his head he might have given a newspaper boy. He went into a low-voiced conversation with Delong. When the conversation got really heated, Delong walked the sad little man over to the shade of a tree in the paddock. Some minutes went by before Wally and Delong returned to Jerome, who was in the process of watching another horse of his go into the tank.

"Jerome," said Delong, "for the last time I ask you. Are you coming into the office for this deal? Because, if you are not, neither am I. But you are calling the shot!"

"What's up?"

"None of your business," said Delong with poise. "If you are worrying about Wally, he's an old buddy. In the army with me. He arranges situations at the track."

"So?"

"So wouldn't you like to know? So it goes tomorrow at Belmont. But I won't be there. I'm interested, vitally interested, in Mr. Simpson, whose interest in me is tied up through you. But if you persist in not playing along with me for the work to be done on Mr. Simpson, I shall visit the track tomorrow afternoon and get my own stake. You, a horse player! Ha!"

With that, Delong left the vicinity of Jerome and met Wally around the corner.

"I'm going, small man," said Delong. "Give that Jerome nothing but the time from now on. I'll see you tomorrow, perhaps, and we'll split a goose together. Otherwise, call at my office day after tomorrow. In the evening. I'll be there." He handed the little man a card and walked out to board a train back to town.

The next day, Jerome came to the office. But he did not call the bookmaker for a figure, nor did he call to make a bet.

"Don't tell me you're reformed," said Delong.

"Listen, Vinnie," said Jerome, a term which was like a red flag to Delong when used by Jerome. It meant trouble. "I'm in a hellava spot. I got that bookmaker on the limb for sixty bucks and I haven't got even the color of money fixed in my eye. You've got to help me out of this spot. What race is that horse going in today?"

"None of your business," said Delong. "Stick around here and make this look like a business office, which it isn't, and you'll be able to pay your playmates off tomorrow. But no tips for you out of me. Do you stay or do I go to the track? 'Cause if you're going to be a horse player, you're out of this deal."

"I'll stay," said Jerome, "but what's the horse. Give me a chance for a bet?"

"Why should you be interested in betting if you are through with horses? You should be cured by now."

Jerome was ominously silent. Delong went about his work diligently for a time. But the larceny in his heart disturbed him. Money lying around with no one picking it up disturbed him immensely. Suddenly he said:

"John, why should we miss this thing? Years ago, I know, races used to be fixed. Do you think it is possible to do such a thing still?"

"It's done every day," said Jerome. "There's one for the jockey occasionally, anyway!"

"This thing looks swell," said Delong, maneuvering himself into position to cure Jerome of horse playing once and for all. Or at least until Mr. Simpson was an accredited associate of the G. Vincent Delong Associates.

"Well, why don't we do something about it?" said Jerome.

OF course, Delong had stretched a point by infering that the race was set for any horse to win. All Wally had told him was that a certain horse called Bombsford would be in there trying. The trainer wanted to get rid of a hayburner and there'd be more chance of having him claimed if he won a couple.

"O. K., Jerome," said Delong, "the horse is Bombsford in the last race today!"

"That pig!" exclaimed Jerome.

"Call him what you want, but the thing is arranged, and when Wally arranges them, they are arranged," he said, and thought to himself that a fat winning could hurt none, least of all himself. "Now listen, Jerome, you've got to stay here and keep Mr. Simpson company, in case he comes in. We've got to get him today or tomorrow or there is no business. No deal!"

Vincent Delong, to force a point, was not beyond subterfuge. He knew very well that Simpson's presence was unlikely until the following day. He told

Jerome that he had to see some shipping men downtown and left the office, catching one of the first trains to Aqueduct. He started with five dollars, which remained from Miss Beston's stake of the previous day, and when it came time to plunge on Bombsford he was ready with a fifty-dollar bill. He bought his tickets on Bombsford with confidence and went to the grass to watch the horses come out on the track. It had commenced to drizzle slightly.

"I wonder if it will slow up this dog," he said to himself.

The horses got away from the post in the mile-and-a-furlong run well bunched. Delong could not see Bombsford, which had closed at $22.40. That meant a $500 winning. What he could not do with such a stake? Then it was that he heard the name of the horse yelled: "Come on, Bombsford." He turned, and there stood Wally beside him. Right near him was Jerome and, worse—there was Mr. Simpson!

"So this is the shipping center?" asked Jerome.

"Why did you bring that guy here?" demanded Vincent. He completely forgot the race. The horses had passed the grandstand and were at the first turn. "You fool! Want the guy to lose confidence in us?"

"This will give him confidence," said Jerome flatly.

"Why?"

"I couldn't see a good thing like this going without a friend with dough knowing it."

"You mean that Simpson is on this dog?"

Delong turned to the race, fright in his eyes. Bombsford was lagging along in fourth place. His position was excellent to strike.

Bombsford came on and ran head and head for fifty yards. Then, as if struck with a tree, he stopped. He faded from a dead heat for the lead to seventh.

"He wore out," said Wally sadly.

"Humph," snapped Mr. Simpson, "sure thing! As sure as that proposition, undoubtedly. Good-by."

He stormed off the grass toward the train. Vincent Delong could not face Jerome. He wanted to murder him.

BUT Vincent Delong was a man who came back strong. The next day he was back in his office with phones ringing and action apparent, even if it was synthetic.

"Miss Beston," he snapped, "if that Jerome comes in while I'm out, don't let him inside this office."

"Not even to place his bets?" she asked.

"Not even to place his feet on my desk," he replied.

"But what's the matter?" the girl asked. "You wanted to cure him of playing the horses and you wanted him to attend to business, did you not?"

"That I did," replied Delong, as he eyed the girl with the approving eye of a wolf about to spring, "but I did not expect him to use the best sucker we've had in months. I wanted him cured, but not that bad." He paused effectively. "By the way, Miss Beston, have you ever thought of the opportunities in the Caribbean?"

"No," she said with finality, "and I'm not going to think about it. What I'm really interested in is a steady salary—and as an added attraction a boss who requires less than half of it back during the week."

Delong cleared his throat. "Take a letter, Miss Beston!"

THE END.

GAS ON THE HOUSE

How a Nasty Swindle Dupes Innocent Victims

THERE IS MUCH speculation about the possible shortage of crude oil and its various by-products, such as gasoline, because of the vast amounts used in this mechanized world.

In fact, some gasoline-station owners and attendants are particularly worried because their accounts sometimes show shortages of the precious fluid without also showing payments for same.

Quite often, the reason for this embarrassing predicament is a swindle which has enjoyed considerable success throughout the nation. The swindle is based on one of the oldest tricks of the game, namely, absconding with the gasoline and money before the victim has time to recover from a totally unexpected turn of events.

All the equipment the swindlers use is two automobiles, a shiny badge, and a crisp, new, ten-dollar bill. In some instances, various bands of these roadside bandits have worked their way right across the United States without incurring any expense for the necessary gasoline and, indeed, have finished the trip considerably richer than when they started. The simple method they employ works as follows:

Picture a dozing Midwestern town, situated on one of the main State highways. There is a gasoline station on the edge of this town manned by a sleepy attendant.

On the afternoon on which the swindlers are passing through this section and find themselves and their cars in need of refueling, a touring car, loaded with from two to five men, roars into the filling station and stops at a pump with a screeching of brakes.

THE driver of the car, his hat pulled down over his eyes, gestures impatiently to the attendant and signals him to fill up the tank and to "Be quick about it!" The other occupants of the car slouch down in their seats, keep looking nervously out the rear window, and altogether act suspiciously.

By this time our sleepy attendant is thoroughly awake. He suspects something is wrong, but not knowing what it is, he does his job. The driver sticks a ten-dollar bill out the window with a request to "Hurry the change, Bud!"

The attendant counts out the change and no sooner hands it to the driver of the strange car than the car is disappearing out of town in a swirl of dust.

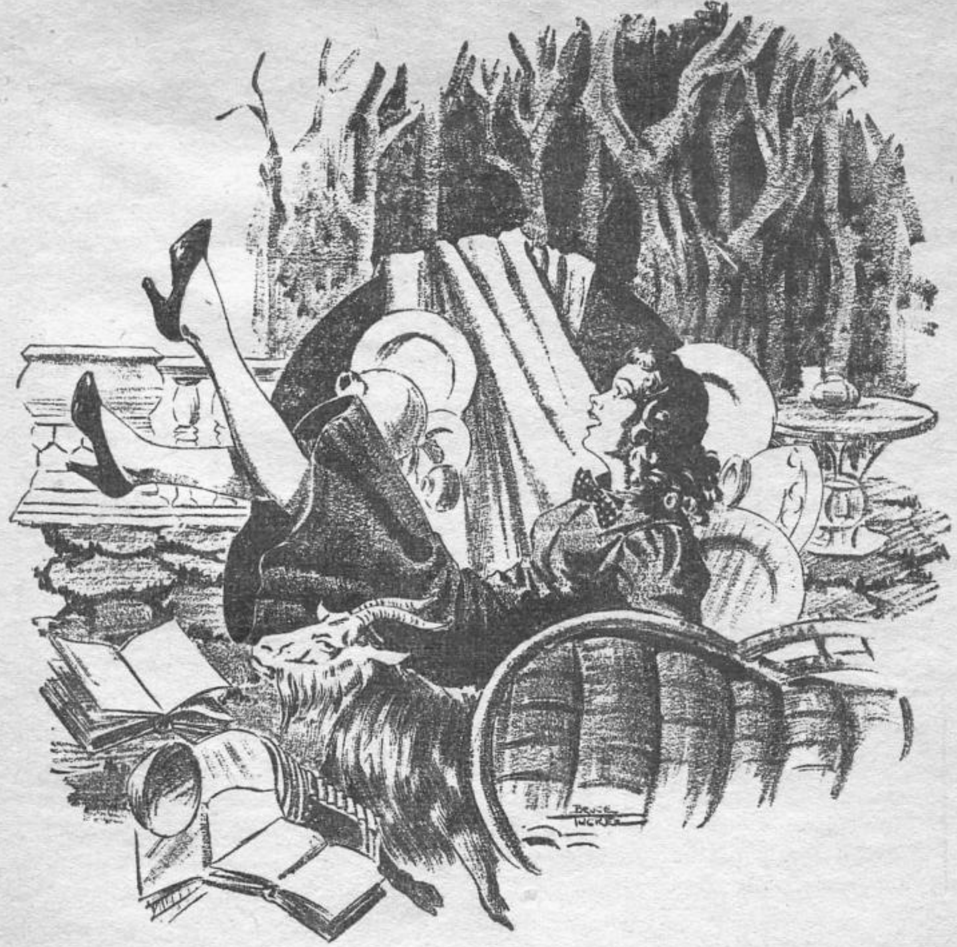
The attendant scratches his head and begins to wonder what the suspicious individuals are up to. Before he has had time to make many guesses, however, a second car screeches into the station.

A keen-looking man flips his coat lapel, disclosing a badge, asks: "Did those guys give you a ten-dollar bill?"

"Yup," the attendant gulps.

"Give it to me!" the man barks. "Those guys are counterfeiters. We're trailing 'em!"

The attendant hands over the ten-spot and another car is gone in the wind, off to more green pastures. The gas is on the house. The next refueling finds the cars reversed.



GOATS IS GOATS

BY JESS CARVER

● Culpepper Twig was lazy and no account but his goats worked very hard for him.

CIDER CREEK and Culpepper Twig basked under the simmering rays of a mid-June sun, Cider Creek in its own special valley, prone between peaceful Pennsylvania foothills, Culpepper back-tilted in his favorite chair before Dave Mooch's poolroom. For relaxation, Culpepper was juggling two pieces of cue chalk, with amazing dexterity.

The day was peaceful and serene. In the distance could be heard the hum and whir of Jake Smiley's sawmill. Across the street, from the dim and cool depths of the Palace Café—Nick Kopotolous, owner and proprietor—a jitney music box jangled out one of America's latest stream-lined popular ballads. From where he sat and juggled and dozed, Culpepper could hear the merry click of the ivories and a couple of local lads battling through a fifty-ball session. A girl in a bright, and tight, yellow sweater swung down the street, and for the first time in a week Culpepper missed catching one of his pieces of chalk.

Despite the heat and somnolence of the day, Culpepper desired action, not for action's sake alone, but so he might improve his personal fortunes. He wished heartily it was any time but the middle of the week, for from Mondays until Fridays Cider Creek was free of roving drummers and coal miners, from whom Mr. Twig made his meager living. The local boys were entirely too hep to risk their hard-earned coin matching skill with Culpepper over the green-clothed tables at so much per match.

Culpepper Twig was a young man of dubious age, dubious ancestry and dubious appearance. His face was long and sallow. His nose was spikelike, and his ridiculously small blue eyes were deep-set and overhung with brows so light as to be practically invisible. His hair was fine and also light and always in need of the attention of a barber. He possessed an Adam's apple which was one of the minor sensations of Calley County; an Adam's apple so pronounced as to appear to be complete with stem. He was long and stringy in build, chicken-breasted and practically hipless. Indeed, Cider Creek folks were wont to remark that Culy Twig's pants hung on him like two flour sacks nailed to a shingle. A narrow shingle.

Culy had just "dropped in" on Cider Creek one day. Why, no one knew. He volunteered the information he was from "over around county-seat way" and let it go at that. He appeared to be a harmless sort of jerk, hell once he got a pool cue in his mitts, but otherwise as unenterprising as a plugged nickel in the U. S. mint. Indeed, many people were of the opinion Culpepper was short a few of his commies.

Attorney at Law G. Dickery Snubb was not concerned with anything pertaining to Mr. Twig as he hurried down the street, save the young man's whereabouts. The thing was, he had business with Mr. Twig, business which was to bring a rather neat fee, fees being as they were with G. Dickery at the moment. He spotted his man in front of the pool emporium and halted before him in businesslike fashion.

"Culpepper, did you ever have an aunt by name of Ella Mae Applegate?"

Mr. Twig scratched thoughtfully at his long proboscis. "Seems like I do recollect hearin' the folks talk about Auntie Ella. Reckon she must be plenty old by now. Why?"

"She's dead," replied Lawyer Snubb crisply. "She's dead and you are her sole heir. She's willed you her entire estate, consisting, to wit, of two hundred dollars in cash, three acres of ground on the county-seat turnpike and twenty goats."

"Did you say two hundred dollars in cash?" Culpepper asked brightly. "In real money?"

"That's right, Culpepper. Two hundred dollars, three acres of land—where, I'll have to find out exactly—and . . . and twenty goats. Now then, I'm going over to the county seat tomorrow, and I'll attend to things for you. But how about the goats? What'll I do about them?"

Mr. Twig pondered some more.

"Guess you might as well have 'em put on my land, wherever it is," he said. "Sure, that's a good idea. Have 'em trucked over to my property."

And so it was arranged. "Of course, Culpepper," added Lawyer Snubb, "there will be a small fee for my services —say, twenty-five dollars."

Culpepper frowned at this. "I'll give you them goats instead," he bargained.

But the lawyer sniffed with disdain. "What would I do with twenty goats? No; twenty-five dollars it'll be."

"O. K.," sighed Mr. Twig, "but I'd like to give you them goats."

WHEN, the next day, the attorney checked on the location of his client's land, he whistled in amazement. According to the records, the patch of ground Mr. Twig had fallen heir to lay to the immediate west, and adjoining, Flickacres, the rather large and imposing estate of the Honorable Delcimus P. Flick, member of Congress, banker and collector of mortgages and Cider Creek's most important, though not best-liked, citizen. The sporting thing for Lawyer Snubb to have done, of course, would have been to tip the senator off to the fact he was suddenly to become the next-door neighbor of twenty healthy goats. But there was little love lost between the attorney and the law maker, so the former merely recorded the transfer of the title, returned to Cider Creek, turned over the deed and the money to Culpepper and went home to await developments.

As he waited, he could not but recall, with some quiet glee, one of the main talking points of the Cider Creek chamber of commerce, the point of the "prevailing westerly breezes" which swept across the town.

Culpepper celebrated only mildly his coming into funds. He squared matters between self and landlady, the widow Schlitz; treated himself to the blue-plate special at Granddad Murphy's Elite Diner (sometimes known as Ptomaine Inn); played, and paid for, three games of pool with Dave Mooch himself, and went home early to his downy, if somewhat lumpy, couch, adding one more lump by placing a fat roll of bills under the mattress.

He was up and about at the unseemly hour of nine o'clock the following morning, surprising in that Mr. Mooch's pleasure palace and his G. H. Q. did not open for business before eleven or even noon. Culpepper breakfasted and repaired to the local hardware store, where he purchased a couple of hundred feet of stout rope. Then he hitchhiked the three miles to his newly acquired acres. His goats, Lawyer Snubb had related, would arrive sometime during the morning. Culy cut a score of stout poles, which he drove into the flinty ground with a large rock. Then he cut his rope into twenty equal lengths and sat down to await the arrival of his bewhiskered pets.

In driving his stakes into the ground, he selected a location along a low rock wall which bounded the estate of Senator Flick, and which was protected from the glare of the sun by a row of elm trees, all on the senator's property. It would be restful and cool for his goats, he reflected, mentally chalking up boy-scout deed No. 1 for the day.

The goats arrived in due time. As they came from the county seat, which was to the westward and, also, windward of Cider Creek and of the Flick estate, Culpepper was aware some fifteen minutes before they hove into sight that

Mary won..

So can you!

NANTICOKE, PA.—MARY HOWELLS, NINETEEN-YEAR-OLD BLUES SINGER, WINS TWO WEEKS' ENGAGEMENT AT MICHAEL TODD'S DANCING CAMPUS AT WORLD'S FAIR.

TODAY, Mary Howells is earning $50. a week in one of the world's greatest night clubs at the World's Fair. Yesterday she had never sung before an audience except in a high-school musical at Nanticoke.

Mary won this chance for fame over many other amateurs in the audition at Michael Todd's Hall of Music. She enjoyed an exciting free day at the World's Fair and today is a guest of that tower of hospitality—Hotel Times Square. "PIC" has paid her return fare from Nanticoke to New York.

Over Station WNEW, which featured Mary Howells on their program for "PIC" amateurs, Mary told reporters, "I have never been so thrilled as when I stepped up to the microphone—and I'm delighted at this chance for fame and big money."

If Mary wins the finals of the "PIC" amateurs she will receive a free trip to Hollywood and a casting interview with a great producer at Paramount Studios.

BUY YOUR COPY OF "PIC" AND ENTER THE

"PIC" AMATEUR CONTEST Now!

they were on their way. He fastened his charges to the stakes, begged a ride into town on the truck which had delivered the goats, and once there, went home to change his clothes. Twenty goats will bring out the sensitiveness in anyone, even a Culpepper Twig.

Then he repaired to his "office" in front of Brother Mooch's, a man of means, of property—and of no little odor.

THERE was more bustle and hustle going on around the Flick mansion that same day than there is around the two-dollar show windows on Derby day. It was the occasion of the annual lawn party and musical, given each year by Mrs. Abigail Flick, loyal and esteemed spouse of the senator, for the ladies of Cider Creek's "Four Hundred." Chairs were arranged on the lawn to the west of the house. Against the stone wall, and under the trees, a long table, piled high with an accumulation of sandwiches, cakes, salads and other more or less messy and indigestible eatables which go to make up the successful lawn fete, had been placed.

The guests arrived in due and good time and were gushingly greeted by their hostess. As they parked themselves about the lawn, a sprightly breeze sprang up, coming, of course, from the west. A few restrained and polite sniffs and puzzled looks were exchanged by some of the guests as the proximity of Culpepper's goats became apparent. But it remained for deaf old Grandma Cooley, Mrs. Flick's paternal grandmother, to force the issue into the open. Grandma's auditory senses may not have been all they should, but there was nothing wrong with her smeller. In the loud tone so often employed by those hard of hearing, Grandma burst out:

"Phew, something's dead around here! Abby, did one of the cows die?"

Mrs. Flick blushed a deep scarlet and hurriedly attempted to both quiet Grandma and quiet the increasing restiveness of her guests. "Oh, it's nothing," she fluttered. "It . . . it's just something they are doing at the sawmill, some new wood they are cutting. It's really nothing, ladies, really nothing at all."

Grandma snorted. "Wood nothing. It's goats; that's what it is, goats."

"But it can't be, Grandma," the harassed Mrs. Flick cried. "Why, there are no goats within miles of here—the senator would never stand for anyone keeping goats."

"I still smell goats," insisted Grandma Cooley, "an' I smell a lot of goats. Mm-m-m, they smell healthy, too."

There was nothing poor Mrs. Flick could do but proceed with the afternoon's entertainment. She did, however, take several sly excursions about the grounds, seeking to discover, if possible, the source of the odoriferous bombardment. A high hedge of chinaberry bushes, however, prevented her from spying out Culpepper's goats.

The pièce de résistance of the program was to be a solo by Madame Miranda LaTour, voice and piano teacher by appointment to the musically inclined of Cider Creek, first soloist at the Presbyterian Church, a musician of minor-league achievement and major-league ambitions. Madame LaTour, formidable of bosom and bustle, with a girlish simper, announced her first offering would be "Oh, That I Had the Wings of a Dove." Rearing back her head, and letting forth a couple of warm-up notes, she let fly.

"N-aaaa! N-aaaa!"

The assembled ladies gasped in unified horror and shock. Madame LaTour shook off the effects of the first interruption, warmed up again with a short series of trills, and this time got the first few notes of her number off awinging. Then:

"N-aaa! N-aaa! N-AAA!"

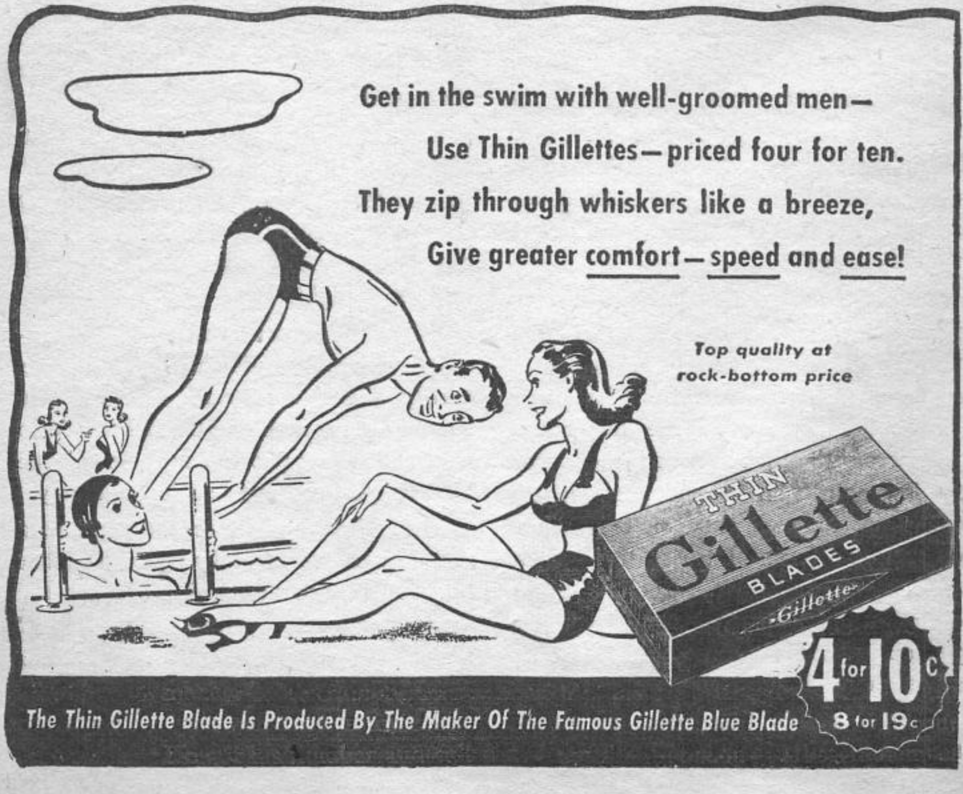
"My," quoth Grandma Cooley, "Mirandy better take care of that cold. She's hoarse as a bull."

Madame LaTour gave up and Abigail Flick was ready to follow suit. By this time, the goats were in full chorus. Then the wind changed, ever so slightly, but enough to waft the odor of the party's tempting viands across the wall. Came der revolution!

A rock, however large and efficiently wielded, is no tool with which to drive stakes into hard ground with any degree of success. Goats, besides being on the smelly side themselves, are no slouches when it comes to whiffing on their own hooks, and being strong, agile animals, it was no truck for them to tear loose their restraining stakes and, en mass, charge over the wall—just as the lawn party moved on the food counter. Came a crashing and n-aa-ing and bleating, shrieks and cries of mingled horror and fright, and in less than the time it takes to relate it the lawn fete and Culpepper's goats were in joint session.

When the assault of the ruminating horned gas attack finally was put down, the annual Flick party was in one hell of a mess!

"I knew it was goats," chortled Grandma Cooley delightedly as she was


Get in the swim with well-groomed men—
Use Thin Gillettes—priced four for ten.
They zip through whiskers like a breeze,
Give greater comfort—speed and ease!
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hustled to a place of safety. "You can't fool me on goats. I declare, Abigail, this was the best party you ever gave."

WHAT happened to Senator Flick when he arrived home for dinner that evening shouldn't happen to any geezer, even a geezer such as the senator. His wife's despair and grief had given way to intense anger and indignation. Someone—one of the maids who got around in Cider Creek—gave a hint as to the ownership of the goats. "Guess they must be the ones Culy Twig got willed," she volunteered. Mrs. Flick, therefore, was able to provide her husband with a hot lead and to send him fuming and cussing into town, supperless.

The old legal training came bouncing to the fore. Senator Flick repaired in a state of high excitement and torrid fury to the city hall. There he satisfied himself that both the property and the goats belonged to Culpepper. "I want to file a nuisance charge against that . . . that bum," he shouted. "I want the police, the health department, the fire department . . . I want those goats out of there at once!"

He had apparently run into an unplayable stymie, however. "I guess there ain't much you can do about it, senator," the mayor stated. "First place, Culy's land is outside the city limits, just across the line. Second, there ain't no law agin' him keepin' goats in the township, long as they ain't ferocious or man-eatin', an' I guess them goats ain't bit anybody yet. Looks like the only thing you can do is to buy Culpepper out, 'less, of course, you figure on sellin' your place."

Baffled at his first point of attack, the now-boiling senator decided on a direct, frontal drive and marched on Mr. Mooch's peaceful bureau of recreation. He found his man chalking a cue, preparatory to taking on a strange and unwary soap salesman who'd somehow been stranded in town overnight. Harsh and flaming words bounced around the dingy, cobwebby walls of Mr. Mooch's resort. "I want those goats out of there by tomorrow, Twig," he roared. "Out, completely, do you understand? Otherwise—"

Culpepper, not one whit abashed in the presence of the great man, thoughtfully studied a difficult combination shot. "I dunno, senator," he drawled. "I sorta hate to give them goats up, now that I got 'em. Seems like they're sorta members of the family, coming from poor ol' Aunt Ella that way."

He stroked the ball, making the shot and dropping three balls into as many different pockets. "Mebbe we can do some business. How'd you like to buy them goats?"

Senator Flick snorted in disgust. "No, I'm not buying your damn goats," he wailed. "You're gettin' them away from my property or I'll . . . I'll call out the national guard. Remember, by tomorrow night."

When the senator had taken his dignified, if wrathful, departure, Culpepper slowly shook his head. "Now, why should a great man like the senator be so peeved at a few poor goats? Seems like he'd be glad to have 'em for company."

Mrs. Flick, by now on the verge of a double nervous breakdown, phoned her husband's office shortly before noon the next morning. "Those goats aren't gone," she screamed. "Not only that; they're building a fence around the place and putting up a big sign. People are stopping to look and laughing their fool heads off. I'm ashamed to move a step out of the house."

"What's on the sign?" queried her goat-weary spouse.

"That's the terrible part of it," his wife replied. "It says 'Flickacres Goat Farm.'"

At that, the senator banged down the receiver, thereby laying up additional trouble to his account at home. He yelled loud and long for his attorney, one Sebastian Tilt.

Counselor Tilt, after hearing his important client's beef, could offer but small solace. "I'm afraid he's got you, senator. He's strictly within his rights. He can even copy the name of your home, unless you happen to have it copyrighted, which you haven't. You can't run him off his land, you can't make him sell his goats, and you can't— Well, the only thing you can do is to buy either the land or the animals."

CULPEPPER'S "goat farm" and particularly the sign heralding same, proved a nine-hour wonder in Cider Creek. Entire families drove past the layout in the cool of the evening, just for one look at the huge signboard and, of course, the twenty somber, whisker-wagging goats. The sign was complete in itself. There it stood, blatant, mocking, its crimson letters rampant on a field of the brightest yellow:

FLICKACRES GOAT FARM
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Do You Need A Goat At Your Lodge?
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The Flicks stood it for two days, but on the third the Senator swallowed both his breakfast and his pride and sought Culpepper at the latter's usual stand in

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front of the pool hall. "Very well, young man," the senator boomed. "You win—this time. How much will it cost me to buy those goats?"

"You want to buy all them goats, senator? Twenty goats is a powerful lot of goats."

"Of course I want them all, you stupid goon," the honorable Delcimus retorted. "How much?"

Culpepper jiggled his ever-present chalk and studied the façade of the Palace Café before he replied: "Well, senator, I figger them goats is worth at least twenty-five dollars apiece to me. Then I'll hafta make a small charge for the work I did puttin' up that fence an' havin' the sign printed and for the good will of the business. Good will's a very important thing, senator. Lemme see—you can have the goats and the good will for six hundred dollars, even, and just to show you my heart's in the right place, I'll throw in the sign. How's that for a fair offer?"

The senator's initial inclination to bellow forth an outright refusal and to consign Culpepper and his goats and his sign to the lower regions was choked off by the sudden thought of what awaited him at home if he didn't do something about the goats that very day. He tried to haggle, but found his adversary singularly ignorant of haggling as a sport. At length, he led Mr. Twig to the bank, where a bill of sale was made out and signed and six crisp new century notes placed in Culpepper's hands.

Naturally, the tale of Culpepper's amazing business acumen, amazing as unexpected, girdled the town with the speed of a new-baby rumor. "That Culy can't be as dumb as he looks," Cider Creek citizens agreed. "Anyone who can take the senator for six hundred is good enough to get one of them jobs in Washington where they spend first an' count afterwards. Yessir, Culpepper must be quite a smart boy."

Senator Flick learned early that one does not go out and purchase twenty goats with impunity. He was confronted with the immediate problem of disposing of his purchases. Was the village butcher interested in running a goat-meat special? He was not. Did anyone in Cider Creek wish to purchase a goat as a pet? They did not. Finally, a farmer some miles out of town agreed to take the beasts off the distracted senator's hands for one dollar a week each. Buy them outright, he refused to do.

"Can't . . . isn't there a possibility of . . . er . . . selling some of the milk?" the Honorable Delcimus queried hopefully.

The farmer gave the great man a look of outright disgust. "Not," he replied, "unless goats have changed a hell of a lot since the last time I seen any. Them goats just ain't the type, senator. Them's billys, not nannys."

It was Mrs. Flick's sharp eyes which caught the ad in the classified section of the *Wallop*. Someone desired to purchase live goats at a reasonable figure. Said someone could be contacted through Box L-65, care of the *Wallop*.

The senator addressed a letter to Box L-65, and by return mail learned that a Mr. Jefferson Applegate, of Rocky Hill, the Calley County seat, would pay five dollars each for all the able-bodied goats the senator might possess. Senator Flick winced at the prospect of taking a five-hundred-dollar kick in the pocketbook, but accepted the offer.

A couple of days later, a rustic-appearing individual, who looked as though he might be related to the celebrated

Mortimer Snerd, stood before the senator's desk. He introduced himself as Jefferson Applegate, and within fifteen minutes the deal was consummated.

"And you can have a sign that goes with them," the senator said in concluding the affair. "It's out in my barn. You can stop and pick it up on your way out of town. But wait—one condition. You'll have to paint out the name Fickacres. Is that understood?"

"Yep," replied Mr. Applegate. "The name don't sound so hot to me, anyway."

In his usual spot, a day later, Culpepper watched with only mild interest the rapid progress of Lawyer Snubb down the street. The man of law stopped, wheezing before the angular dealer in goats. "Culpepper," he gasped, "I thought you sold those goats to Senator Flick. I just came past your place, an' those goats are back again. How come?"

Culpepper tossed a block of chalk high into the air, catching it deftly on the back of his hand. "I did sell them goats to the senator," he replied blandly, "but seems like the senator didn't appreciate 'em. He went an' sold them hisself, and guess who to. To my cousin Jeff, Aunt Ella's boy. Me an' Jeff's in business together now. I'm rentin' him my property for his goats.

"You know," Culy concluded, "them goats just ain't happy anywheres but next to the senator. Seems they like it out there 'cause it's so nice and peaceful."

THE END.

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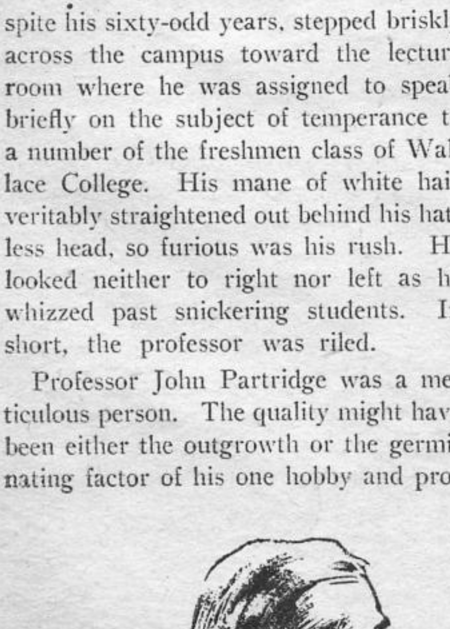
OIL & THE TRIANGLE

BY DEAN PARKER

• Professor John's world turned topsy-turvy and left him very dizzy.

PROFESSOR PARTRIDGE, despite his sixty-odd years, stepped briskly across the campus toward the lecture room where he was assigned to speak briefly on the subject of temperance to a number of the freshmen class of Wallace College. His mane of white hair veritably straightened out behind his hatless head, so furious was his rush. He looked neither to right nor left as he whizzed past snickering students. In short, the professor was riled.

Professor John Partridge was a meticulous person. The quality might have been either the outgrowth or the germinating factor of his one hobby and profession, mathematics. When outside the classroom he enjoyed a busman's holiday by dabbling in calculus or laying out a garden according to equations. He was a genius in his field and, like many others of his type, had a notorious reputation for being rather naïve about the more realistic side of life. Like the old Greek philosopher who fell into the well while studying the stars.



He gazed cautiously out the window and met the eyes of fifty students.

He had fallen into his most recent well when an honest-looking chap with a ruddy complexion and a ready smile had sold him a hundred shares of oil stock. Simple Tommy Shaw, the campus ground-keeper, would have had enough horse sense to shoo the fellow away, but the professor had received him with an open mind and outstretched arms.

The students had got wind of the deal and everybody on the campus was still laughing at the elderly gentleman's expense. John Partridge, however, had merely tightened the thin line of his lips and lost himself further in a cloud of mathematics. The rules of *it* at least were safe, not depending upon human vagaries.

What hurt him right now, though, was the fact that the college board, either purposely or through accident, was rubbing sore his already tender position on the campus by appointing him to make the annual temperance lecture to the freshmen before the school took recess for spring vacation. For, unfortunately, the chap with the ruddy cheeks had sold the stock to the professor for an oil field described on the stock certificates as the

Crowdinn Fields. Filled with a vague uneasiness after the salesman had left town hurriedly without leaving a forwarding address, Professor Partridge had inquired of the local Merchant's & Farmer's Bank as to the standing and reputation of Crowdinn oil stock. This had been a major mistake, realized by John Partridge after the town paper picked up news of the deal from the bank.

The awful headlines had run an inch deep, streamered across the front page:

LOCAL PROFESSOR LOSES
FIVE THOUSAND IN SWINDLE
Crowdinn Stock Unheard Of By Bank

And the awful coincidence was that there was a favorite student hang-out, situated on the edge of town and thoroughly frowned upon by the college authorities, known as Crowd Inn. It had been a thorn in the side of the strict college rulers ever since a surveyor had discovered that Crowd Inn was over the township line and therefore not subject to the rigid dry laws of the town. The college students had pounced upon the fact and gloried in late beers and hamburgers ever since.

They also pounced upon the fact that Crowdinn was a glorious corruption of its equally ill-starred synonym. Consequently, Professor Partridge had been hearing sibilant whisperings of the name of his worthless gilt paper every time he turned to the blackboard in class to construct a parabola or shift an integer. He had tried for weeks to catch the whispering parties. He had wheeled so much in an attempt to catch the tormentors at his back that he was spoken of in the student dormitories as the whirling dervish.

And now, just when the hazing of his costly venture was dying out from lack of additional fuel, the faculty had commissioned him to speak on the subject of temperance. Temperance! When the only liquor problem in town was a little shack called Crowd Inn! Small wonder that the white mane of Professor Partridge was streaming in the April breeze as he bounded up the steps of Wallace Hall to the lecture room.

A FEW students guffawed as Professor John passed them in the hall. He returned their stare hotly, but got a queer feeling in the pit of his stomach when he realized that he soon was to face some forty more in the lecture room. He decided to step into the faculty rest room to compose himself and comb his tangled white mass of hair. Mr. Vest, the young English assistant, returned Professor Partridge's weak smile with an embarrassed grin. Mr. Vest seemed about to say something, but only opened and closed his mouth.

Professor Partridge straightened his cravat before the mirror and realized that he was stalling for time. "It's a fine state of affairs when a man of my age is frightened by a few snickering freshmen," he muttered to himself viciously.

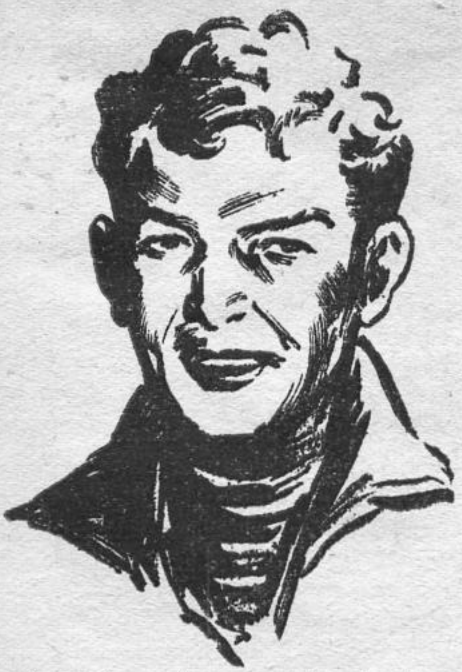
Mr. Vest overheard the muttering and looked up, startled.

"Just rehearsing a lecture." Professor John beamed airily. "I have the first-year students for the temperance lecture, you know."

Mr. Vest nodded weakly.

The professor glanced at his watch. It was three minutes past the official time for the start of the class. The room should be filled. With a last defiant straightening of his shoulders, he waved farewell to the entranced Mr. Vest and walked swiftly out of the rest room toward the lecture room.

"Best not to let them get the upper hand," he thought to himself as his hand



A sneering senior remarked pointedly: "Don't ever trust a mathematic's prof."

sought the doorknob of the classroom. And with that in mind he banged open the door and strode forcefully into the empty room.

Yes, it was empty. Professor John looked about him in amazement. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that the room was empty only of students. For it was well filled with other things; colorful things. For instance, against the rear wall was a huge advertisement of a liquor company, extolling the wonderful properties of Old Sweetheart rum. Empty liquor bottles of all descriptions littered the floor and the desks. And across the front blackboard was nailed a gigantic poster:

COME TO CROWD INN
Promotion manager: John Partridge

Professor Partridge walked heavily toward the window which looked out over the campus. As he expected there was a considerable number of students gazing anxiously back up at him. Fifty eyes were hastily averted when they met the eyes of John Partridge. And fifty pairs of feet began hastily breaking ground in various directions.

At a footfall behind him, Professor John turned from his sad contemplation. A freshman was standing in the doorway with open mouth, staring at the wild disarray of the classroom. Professor Partridge realized suddenly that this was probably the only freshman in school who had not been informed of the plan. Instantly the professor felt a feeling of kinship with him, for the fellow had undoubtedly been sent by upper classmen as a hoax.

"There will be no lecture today," the professor said softly. "The class decided to bring in posters instead."

PROFESSOR PARTRIDGE did a lot of thinking that night in his single apartment, and for once it wasn't entirely about mathematics. He realized that he was going to have to act quickly or else life on the Wallace College campus would soon become unbearable.

He took account of his position. He had lost, if the stock proved to be utterly worthless, approximately five thousand dollars. He had paid fifty dollars a share for one hundred shares of Crowdinn stock. Drat the name! However, the five thousand dollars was the least of his loss. He was comfortably well off and could stand losing the money. What he couldn't stand losing at his age was his respect for his fellow men and the students' respect for him. And it looked as though he had begun to lose both of them.

His respect for fellow men had slipped considerably when the pleasant oil salesman had proved a crook. And the students' respect for him had slipped because he had been taken in. There was a problem to be solved to get the latter back, but John Partridge was at his best when confronted with a problem.

He looked at his calendar. Spring vacation would be starting at the end of the week. It was of a week's duration. Time for him to retreat to his Lake Superior property and think of a solution. He could always think best, anyway, when settled in his cozy summer place situated on a large bay of the great lake.

But meanwhile there were several of his math classes to be faced this week. He must not wait until the end of spring vacation to begin wooing back the admiration and respect of his students. He would begin tomorrow in his early-morning physics class. The men in that class were mostly seniors, and if he won them over, the rest of the school would not be long in following.

THE word of the freshmen's treatment of Professor Partridge's temperance-lecture classroom had spread around the campus like the proverbial wildfire. Consequently, the senior physics students in Professor John's class the next morning were prepared for rare sport. They were in for a surprise.

Professor Partridge popped into the room like a lark, beamed over his group and then asked heartily if they had heard of the "good joke" which had been played on him. He chuckled all through the class, as though in fond memory of it. His students watched the display of glee in complete amazement. Afterward, their reaction was perhaps best summed up by a sneering senior who remarked:

"Don't trust a mathematic's prof. He's got something up his sleeve or he wouldn't be so happy."

However, before the campus had enough time to analyze painstakingly the

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new attitude, spring vacation was upon it and the problem was deferred; like most of the tuition for the next year.

AS he had hopefully anticipated, the answer to the professor's problem came to him as he sat on the porch of his summer home. When the full force of it hit him it almost jolted him off the rocker. It would not only win back the good will of the students, but it would also settle forever the issue of the worthless stock.

The professor's voice boomed out to his caretaker: "Henry, get the launch ready. We're going out on the bay."

After that, neighboring folks on the bay wondered what the professor and his hired man were up to. The professor had never been much on fishing, preferring to work on his porch over graphs and charts. But all during that week of spring vacation the professor and Henry could be seen cruising about the bay in the launch, if they were not at anchor in the middle, apparently fishing.

Spring vacation at Wallace College had been late that year, and when the faculty and students returned after it, they found to their joy and chagrin, respectively, that final examinations and the summer recess were only a brief six weeks away.

Until Professor Partridge realized this fact, he almost believed that his problem had been solved for him, because the students seemed unusually quiet, attentive and respectful. When he remembered the proximity of examinations, however, he understood that the attitude was merely a temporary cessation of hostilities on the part of the students. Therefore, Professor Partridge resolved to announce his brain child conceived on the shore of Lake Superior.

The week before examinations started, Professor John announced all his math students were to assemble in the auditorium of the campus for an important bit of news about their coming math finals. This news was greeted with mingled fears of apprehension and dread by the math students. They expected the worst after their treatment of Professor John Partridge.

But that worthy dismissed all such fears on the morning set for the meeting in the auditorium. Professor John mounted the rostrum to face some thirty-five students, all his math majors.

"Students," he declared triumphantly, "I have secured permission to conduct your regular math examination in a somewhat unusual fashion this year."

Thirty-five hearts sank as one.

"As you may know," Professor John continued confidentially, "I have a summer home on the shore of a large bay of Lake Superior, just fifty-some miles from here. I have arranged to transport the whole class there by special bus next Saturday. The examination will be given Saturday morning and you will all participate Saturday afternoon in a field experiment in math which will count toward your mark for the year in my course.

"However"—and here Professor John wagged an impishly exultant finger at the astounded assemblage—"there will also be offered a special prize for the student who solves the problem in the field experiment. We will not return to college until the following Monday, so have your bags packed for an early departure on Saturday morning, and include a swimming suit."

The words of the professor were drowned in a great cheer. It was almost too good to be true; both from the viewpoint of the students and of Professor John.

The raised hands of Professor Partridge quieted the tumult. "As you leave the auditorium you will find a stack of

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pamphlets. Take them, for they will explain the field experiment and," concluded the professor with a chuckle, "also the prize."

There was a rush for the pamphlets and thirty-five heads bent over their identical messages, printed beneath a rough map of what was evidently the professor's property. The message read:

> As you know my property is situated on a large bay of the lake. On that bay I have plotted out a point in this manner: The high gable on my house is the apex of the right angle of a right triangle. The hypotenuse of the triangle is an imaginary line running between a prominent cliff peak on the north shore and the top of a huge pine tree on the summit of the south shore. You are to bisect the right angle and where the line of bisection crosses your imaginary hypotenuse, the point will be located. At that point I have sunk a watertight box, anchored so that it floats about six feet beneath the surface; just visible if one looks into the water directly over it. In that box is sealed one hundred shares of Crowdinn Oil stock. You will be provided with the necessary equipment for the experiment, including rowboats, and the winner may keep the (watered) stock. The winner will also find a crisp ten-dollar bill in the box.

Of course, there were loud howls of laughter when the students reached the part about the stock. But it proved to them that the professor could take it. All in all, it looked like a week end of fun, despite the fact that a final examination was part of it.

PROFESSOR PARTRIDGE noted the reaction and was pleased, especially at the laughter. That was what he had been after. He left the auditorium and walked over toward the college office to pick up any mail before returning to his apartment.

"You're not thinking of leaving us to join the CCC, are you, professor?" asked the college office secretary as she handed John Partridge a letter. The professor smiled dimly at the stamp of the Civilian Conservation Corps division in the upper left corner of the envelope.

"No," he chuckled, "although, with classes dismissed in two weeks, it perhaps wouldn't be a bad connection for the summer months. He waved the letter at her airily, enjoying his own joke. "It's in reference to that land of mine on Lake Superior. The local general up there wrote to me some time ago, asking permission for his corps to survey the property. They're looking for some kind of tree disease or something. I wrote permission and I suppose this is a report to a co-operative taxpayer."

The explanation concluded, the professor's face resumed a more dignified demeanor. "Was there . . . eh . . . any other mail?"

The secretary wagged her head in doubt as she riffled through the mail again. Finally she pulled out of the pile another letter addressed to the professor. "That's all for today."

Professor Partridge glanced casually at the return address of the second letter and received a jolt. The name stamped on it was "Crowdinn Oil Fields." Professor Partridge fumbled it open and devoured its contents. There was a dividend check for one hundred dollars inclosed with the information that a rich well had been hit and that prospects for its holding up looked good.

For a few moments the professor thought that for the first time in his life he was going to faint. But he didn't. Instead, he let out a whoop of pure joy. The fact that his now-precious stock was floating somewhere under Lake Superior did not dismay him in the least. Because the professor knew just where that somewhere was. Or at least he could find out in short order by working out the points of his triangle again.

As soon as he got home, Professor John couldn't resist calling up the local paper and telling the news. They already had the story of the examination and the pamplet, so, on a sudden inspiration, he told them that the field experiment would go on as planned, but that the student who now located the hidden box of stock first would have five shares of it signed over to him by the professor.

"And how much do you think each share should be worth now?" Professor Partridge was asked by the phone voice of the paper.

A rapid calculation and the professor had the answer. Even so, it almost startled him when he said it: "I should judge that each share, in the light of present developments, will be worth approximately one hundred and fifty dollars."

"And how much is the total value of the stock now submerged in Lake Superior?" the voice continued.

Another lightning calculation and: "That would make the value of all my stock about fifteen thousand dollars." Professor Partridge trembled, the full shock of the situation beginning to reach him. He hung up weakly and tried to marshal his thoughts into a review of the mad developments of the past hour.

They seemed to be not such bad goings-on. He had been entirely vindicated from all the ridicule he had suffered, certainly. Here, after all the fuss, his stock had turned out to be a veritable gold mine. The professor turned the triumph over in his mind slowly, enjoying it to the full.

For a terrible moment he wondered whether he would be able to relocate the point where the stock was submerged, in the event that none of the students discovered it. He dashed to his desk. Yes, there were his graphs which he had made

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when he sunk the box. It would be a simple task to go directly to the treasure with those charts. All he would need would be the points of his triangle.

The professor settled comfortably in his chair. Something poked him in the side. He reached into his pocket and pulled out the other letter that the office secretary had given him, the one from the CCC.

Suddenly Professor John Partridge turned white. A horrifying, sinking sensation engulfed him. "The CCC," he stammered, as he ripped open the envelope. Its terse message confirmed his worst fears as he scanned it:

> . . . and the only thing of any possible consequence affected on your property was the huge pine tree which overlooks the south shore of the bay. It was so infected with the pine rust we are combating that it was necessary to remove it.
>
> Signed,
> ROBERT ANDERSON,
> Civilian's Conservation Corp.

For the second time that day, Professor Partridge felt that he was going to faint. But this time, with a silly little smile playing about his mouth, he succumbed to it and slid silently to the floor. They had cut down the old pine tree—the old pine tree which was one of the very necessary points of his blasted triangle.

THE END.

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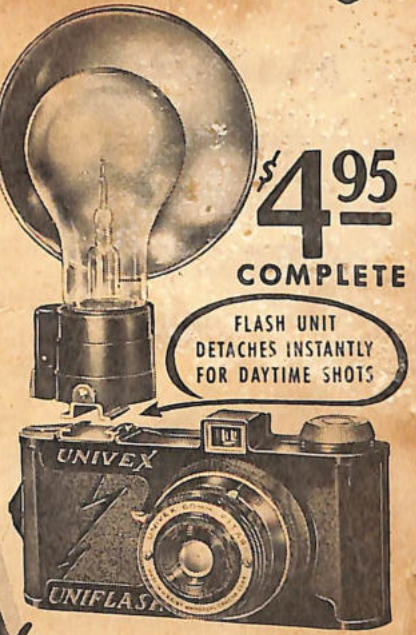

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